

**RUDOLF OTTO'S INTERPRETATION
OF RELIGION**

RUDOLF OTTO'S INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

BY ROBERT F. DAVIDSON



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P R E F A C E

SINCE the death of Rudolf Otto in 1937, the need for a comprehensive and systematic study of his thought has become increasingly apparent. Few men in our day have contributed as much as has Otto to a clearer understanding of the nature of religion and few books have attracted such widespread attention as did his *Idea of the Holy*. Yet no adequate consideration of Otto's position has been available. This need the present volume undertakes in some measure at least to meet.

It is a pleasure to be able to acknowledge here my obligation to those whose kind assistance has contributed so materially to the successful completion of this study. Professor Douglas C. Macintosh of the Yale Divinity School and Professor Horace L. Friess of Columbia University were especially generous in their encouragement and assistance. The manuscript was read in part or in full by Professor Herman Brautigam of Colgate University and Professor George Thomas of Princeton University. Their friendly but penetrating criticism has enabled me to remove some initial defects and in general to improve the organization and development of the work as a whole. Much of the Introduction has appeared already in *The Review of Religion* and *The Christian Century*. I am grateful to the editors of these two journals for permission to use this material with some revision in the present volume.

Throughout this study I have quoted from the English

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translations of Otto's works, wherever translations were available, feeling that such references would be of greater usefulness to the English reader. In a number of passages, however, the English translations fail to convey accurately significant shades of meaning in the German originals. In such instances I have made my own translation directly from the original and have indicated this by reference to the German text in the footnote. It has seemed desirable for convenience in such cases to refer the reader also to the passage as it appears in the English translation. Hence a double reference is found in the footnote, the reference to the parallel passage in the English translation appearing in parenthesis after the reference to the German text from which the translation is made. Such double citations appear more frequently in quotations from *Das Heilige* and *The Idea of the Holy*, but they are also to be found in several quotations from Otto's other works. All quotations from *Das Heilige* are from the 21-22 Edition, C. H. Beck, Munich, 1932.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

RUDOLF OTTO AND *THE IDEA OF THE HOLY*

THE LEADERSHIP of German thought has been well established in Protestant theological circles since the time of the Reformation and Rudolf Otto stands out among those men who have helped to perpetuate it into our own day. There are at present, of course, unmistakable indications that this intellectual preeminence of Germany has been at least temporarily brought to an end. The crisis in the German Church itself, the policies of the German government for the past decade or more, and the inevitable consequences of a tragic period of post-war reconstruction, all make continued German leadership in the theological thought of the Western World highly improbable.

In his discerning study of *Contemporary English Theology* Walter Horton recently suggested that the intellectual leadership of Western Christendom was passing to England. It may well be, as critics of Horton's study insisted, that American theology is now prepared to assert its independence of all foreign domination and develop an original and characteristic theological position of its own. But certainly as yet no British or American influence has been exerted upon contemporary religious thought comparable in significance or permanence to that emanating from Germany. Indeed Horton himself hastens

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to point this out in his own later work, *Contemporary Continental Theology*.

The viewpoint of Protestant Christianity during the past two decades has been largely shaped by the theology of Karl Barth and by Rudolf Otto's philosophy of religion—in Europe to a marked degree, in America to a much more limited but increasing extent. Whatever the theoretical validity of their positions may prove to be, both these men have apprehended and formulated in striking fashion something of the inner spirit of the present age. The thought of both must be ranked among the formative influences in the theological development of our generation. Numerous studies of the Barthian theology have appeared in English, but Otto's books, although widely commented upon, have been left in the main to speak for themselves.

I

Few books indeed have made such large and immediate impact upon the religious world as Otto's major work, *The Idea of the Holy*. Published in 1917, its appeal was unquestionably enhanced by the widespread spirit of disillusionment engendered at that time by the first World War. Acute need was felt for some interpretation of man's life and destiny more satisfying than the secular and purely rational outlook prevalent in the years preceding the war. Otto's *Idea of the Holy* as definitely as Barth's *Commentary on Romans* provided a reorientation of life upon a distinctly religious basis, emphasizing a "dimension of depth" in experience which "liberal" Protestant theology had too largely lost from view. As a result both Otto and Barth at once commanded general attention.

An indication of the appeal and, to some extent, the importance of Otto's thought is to be found in the attention

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his book attracted. In Germany *Das Heilige* has gone through twenty-five editions (the latest in 1936) and has been published also in cheaper form for student use during a period hardly favorable for the wide circulation of scholarly studies. Within twelve years after its initial appearance it was translated into seven other languages (into English in 1923, Swedish in 1924, Spanish in 1925, Italian in 1926, Japanese in 1927, Dutch in 1928, and French in 1929). The English translation, *The Idea of the Holy*, has itself been reprinted six times and was included recently (1936) in a cheaper edition on the Oxford Book shelf. Otto's position has occasioned comment in almost every important theological work in Germany since the date of its publication and in Great Britain since its translation. To the widespread interest aroused by *The Idea of the Holy* may likewise be attributed the rapid translation into English of Otto's later works, which in the main are but historical or theological amplifications of its cardinal tenets.

The significance of Otto's book is not due, however, merely to its timeliness. Not only its discerning portrayal of religious experience but also its truly remarkable synthesis of the major tendencies of modern German theology mark it as one of the great books of our day. A typical comment is that of Charles A. Bennett: "In recent years the most striking and original attempt to distill the essence of religion is, beyond all question, that of Professor Otto in his book, *Das Heilige*."¹

The publication of *Das Heilige* established Otto almost immediately as one of Germany's foremost theologians. Prior to that time he had been professor of systematic

¹ "Religion and the Idea of the Holy." *Journal of Philosophy*, August 19, 1926, p.461.

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theology at Göttingen (1904-1914) and at Breslau (1914-1917). In 1917 he was appointed to the same position at Marburg. The influence of his *Hauptwerk* was so great indeed that he was later offered the highly esteemed chairs in this field at the University of Halle and the University of Berlin. He was soon invited, largely for the same reason, to important lectureships throughout the English-speaking world. In 1924 he visited the United States, giving the Haskell Lectures at Oberlin College and speaking at other leading American Universities. Some years thereafter he was chosen to give the University of Calcutta Lectures on Comparative Religion, and was also selected to deliver the Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen. Unfortunately, however, because of failing health he was not able finally to fill either of the latter appointments.

Otto's fame as a theologian, the inspirational quality of his teaching, and more perhaps than anything else, the depth of his own spiritual life, drew students from all the world to the beautiful university town of Marburg, where he chose to remain until his death in 1937, despite tempting offers of other posts that came to him. In increasing numbers during the nineteen-twenties aspiring young theologians from England and America met with those of Germany to find deepened insight and enlarged appreciation of religion in his Marburg seminars. A common path led visitors from the Orient and from the Occident to his study door. All were impressed by the catholicity of his spirit and understanding as well as by the genuineness of his interest in the issues discussed with him.²

The breadth of Otto's interest and the depth of his spiritual insight is well evidenced by his important contri-

² cf. J. S. Bixler, "Rudolf Otto as a Religious Teacher." *The Christian Century*, July 17, 1929.

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bution to the devotional life of the Lutheran Church. In addition to numerous articles and a volume devoted directly to discussion of improved method in public worship (*Zur Erneuerung und Ausgestaltung des Gottesdienstes*, 1925), he collaborated for a number of years in the publication of such devotional materials as orders of service for special occasions, prayers for use in church, school and home, and general liturgical aids for ministers.

Nor was he content to write of worship simply from the viewpoint of a theological professor. Instead, in more concrete experimental fashion, he undertook in a chapel near Marburg to develop a more vital and dynamic worship experience, thus infusing into institutional religion something of the mystical spirit and insight that his theological studies manifest so clearly.³ Combining a practical with an historical purpose Otto also established and promoted zealously the *Marburger religionskundliche Sammlung*, a fine collection of ritualistic symbols of all sorts, primitive, Oriental and Christian.

In the same practical fashion he gave enthusiastic support to the missionary activity of his own Communion, taking a place of leadership in that endeavor without endorsing a narrow or sectarian evangelistic program. Indeed he united with his missionary interest not only a wholehearted advocacy of the more effective unity of Protestantism throughout the world, but likewise a deep and genuine appreciation of the great non-Christian faiths. From such breadth of vision the missionary enterprise itself could not but profit. It is no exaggeration to say that throughout his life Otto was concerned primarily with religion that was vital and inspiring rather than with

³ An interesting description of Otto's chapel and the work there is given by B. E. Meland, *Modern Man's Worship* (Harpers, 1934) Ch. IV.

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a theory of religion that was logical and consistent. This concern brought a richness and penetration to his own philosophy of religion not to be found in many interpretations that perhaps exhibit greater theoretical and systematic precision.

II

Every tendency of importance in recent German theology left its impress upon Otto's thought, and he made the spirit and the enduring insight of each in a very real sense his own. Lutheran piety and faith quite naturally condition his approach to religion and his point of view in general. Nurtured in the Lutheran Communion and in the theology of Luther, he never seriously questioned its position that religion is essentially a matter of inner spiritual experience. The first work he published was a study of Luther's idea of the Holy Spirit (*Die Anschauung vom heiligen Geiste bei Luther*, 1898). With this background it was inevitable that certain dominant aspects of Luther's religious life and thought should continually force themselves upon Otto's attention and shape his own conception of religion. He remained an enthusiastic disciple of Luther as long as he lived, reenforcing his own position again and again by appeal to the authority of the Great Reformer.

At the Universities of Erlangen and Göttingen, where he was educated during the last decade of the nineteenth century, Otto was greatly impressed also by the dominant Ritschlian theology and Kantian critical philosophy. His mature interpretation of religion rests largely upon this early Kantian-Ritschlian foundation. But further studies of Schleiermacher and a growing interest in the Neo-Friesian movement initiated by Leonard Nelson at Göttingen soon modified both his Ritschlian and his Kantian

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outlook. A centennial edition of Schleiermacher's *Addresses on Religion* which he brought out in 1899, together with several articles published immediately thereafter, reveal clearly the extent of Schleiermacher's influence. Nor was the allegiance professed at this time to the methodology and general viewpoint of the *Addresses* ever relinquished. Something of Schleiermacher's spirit is to be found in all of Otto's later work.

During the next ten years, however, he was increasingly attracted by the philosophy of Jakob Friedrich Fries, an early nineteenth century disciple of Kant who sought to develop the Kantian critique of reason along more definitely idealistic lines. Although Fries is much less important in the judgment of conventional histories of modern philosophy than his contemporaries, Hegel, Fichte or Schelling, he had again been given a place of prominence in German philosophical circles by Leonard Nelson's able advocacy of his position. Otto, a colleague of Nelson's at Göttingen during the first decade of the present century, became a leading member of the Neo-Friesian school established there. His *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie*, written in 1909 and translated as *The Philosophy of Religion* (1931), was one of the more important publications of the Neo-Friesian movement. In that work Otto undertook to do for the philosophy of religion what Nelson had already done so forcefully in the realm of epistemology; that is, to present in effective fashion the position outlined by Fries, removing any defects or inconsistencies in its original statement and developing constructively the valid insight contained therein.

Yet a systematic philosophy of religion was never of primary interest to Otto. The empirical approach to theology adopted by Ernst Troeltsch and the German

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“religio-historical” school had quite as much effect upon him during his years at Göttingen as did the Neo-Friesian philosophy. Indeed one of his former students there has recently maintained that the Friesian idealism was merely a “foil” for Otto’s religio-historical method of interpretation.⁴ Such an assertion fails to recognize adequately the influence of Fries upon Otto’s thought, but it does suggest his greater concern for empirical religion than for philosophical theory. And it reveals clearly the sort of impression his teaching was making at that time. The idealism of Fries interested him, Otto himself points out, largely because it afforded sound philosophical foundation for a more concrete “science of religion” (*Religionswissenschaft*).⁵ With the religio-historical school he accepted as the task of theology the accurate psychological and historical (“scientific”) analysis of man’s religious consciousness. This conception of theology shaped his *Idea of the Holy* as definitely as it did his later studies of religion.

Actually it was Wilhelm Wundt’s influential work on *Folk Psychology* that stirred Otto to undertake the formulation of his mature theory of religion. He was impelled to this by the very persuasiveness of Wundt’s statement of a position so completely antithetical to that gradually taking shape in his own mind. In 1910 he published an article attacking Wundt’s position in detail (“Mythus und Religion in Wundts Völkerpsychologie”), and this controversy launched him upon a careful analysis of religious experience which eventually paved the way for his *Idea of the Holy* (1917). Otto himself in a later study attributes the origin of his masterpiece to a more specific theological

⁴ Fr. Delekat, “Rudolf Otto und das Methodenproblem in der heutigen systematischen Theologie.” *Die Christliche Welt*, Nr. 1, 1930.

⁵ *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie*, p.2.

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concern—the desire to provide an adequate interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement.⁶ But the historic psycho-logical portrayal of religion, which has occasioned such general interest in *The Idea of the Holy*, is a direct development of the viewpoint adopted in his article on Wundt.

The controversy with Wundt likewise fixed Otto's attention upon "primitive" religion. A trip to North Africa, India and Japan in 1911-12 provided opportunity for more direct observation of religion in its cruder stages; it also gave Otto a new and abiding appreciation of the great Oriental faiths. Numerous studies and translations from the complex religious thought of India grew out of that trip, and these studies established Otto as one of the most discerning Western interpreters of Hinduism. Indeed the last monographs completed prior to his death were German translations and analyses of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Katha-Upanishad (1934-36). As a result of this contact with the East something of the mystical spirit of India permeated Otto's own religious life, deepening and broadening his Lutheran heritage. Its effect is already to be seen in *The Idea of the Holy*, is much more apparent in two later volumes, *Mysticism East and West* (1926) and *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity* (1930), and is quite evident also in his final major work, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* (1934).

Christian theology, however, was Otto's principal and enduring interest. History, psychology and philosophy were for him simply "handmaidens of theology." That such was the case in his masterpiece, he himself several times went out of his way to point out. "Our line of inquiry in *The Idea of the Holy*," he wrote, "was directed toward

⁶ *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, p.105n.

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Christian theology and not towards religious history or the psychology of religion.” “This book had its origin in efforts to provide in my lectures for myself and my pupils an approach to the profoundest of all Christian intuitions which I perceived to be both indicated and concealed in the Orthodox constructions of the doctrine of ‘reconciliation,’ and which did not seem to me to have been found in the essays of Ritschl on *Justification and Reconciliation*.⁷”

Theological issues are equally basic in Otto’s other important studies and translations of religious thought. Of the large number of essays that were added to later German editions of *Das Heilige* the more significant were selected and published separately in 1932 under the title, *Sin and Original Guilt*. (Most of these are included in the English volume of Otto’s *Religious Essays*.) His volume on mysticism and his comparison of Christianity with religion in India are both devoted primarily to the meaning of salvation. Even his earlier work on the philosophy of Fries is motivated, as already suggested, by a predominantly theological purpose. This is quite explicitly indicated in the second half of its title and in its subtitle, neither of which are included in the English translation.⁸

In every instance, however, theology for Otto is primarily an historico-psychological “science of religion,” designed to provide understanding of concrete religious experience; it is not a dogmatic or systematic exposition of Christian faith. As a result there is large similarity between his approach and that adopted by the contemporary phenomenological school in Germany. Indeed his own enduring contribution to modern theology may perhaps

⁷ *Religious Essays*, p.30; *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, p.105n.

⁸ *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie und ihre Anwendung auf die Theologie. Zur Einleitung in die Glaubenslehre für Studenten der Theologie*.

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best be seen as a penetrating and highly suggestive “phenomenology of religion.”

III

Otto's work as a whole, whether practical or theoretical, devotional or theological, historical or philosophical, is dominated by one unifying principle—an almost passionate insistence upon the autonomy of religion. In his interpretation of this dominant principle Otto draws together and reformulates in original terms the cardinal insights of the greatest figures in modern German theology. Luther and Kant, Schleiermacher and Ritschl, Fries and Troeltsch, all contribute essential elements to his mature conception of religion.

Already in Otto's early study of Luther, *Die Anschauung vom heiligen Geiste bei Luther*, there is clear recognition of a specific type of experience, characteristically religious in nature, existing in its own right alongside moral and aesthetic experience, and possessing its own claim to validity over against the rational, scientific interpretation of reality. “Whether one accounts for the religious experience as one aspect of feeling in general, or as a special capacity for the supersensible,” he wrote at that time; “in any case that which we call religious experience comes into being as soon as the religious object is consciously perceived, in accord with exactly the same compulsion of psychological motivation through which our moral or aesthetic experience arises when a corresponding object comes into consciousness.” “The religious feeling has rightful claim to its own scope, unimpaired and unobstructed. It should not allow itself to be curtailed or eliminated in favor of other plausible trains of thought; and it might well be the task of theology to reexamine that crushing chain of empirical relationships until it can find

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place for an answer to the question how religion is possible —and possible, moreover, in uncurtailed form.”⁹ The influence here of Schleiermacher as well as of Luther is obvious. And in an essay published a few years later, “How Schleiermacher Rediscovered Religion” (1903), Otto insists again in vigorous fashion upon the uniqueness and independence of the religious consciousness that Schleiermacher had so appealingly depicted.¹⁰

Recognizing clearly that the rising prestige of the natural sciences offered a serious challenge to the autonomy of religion, Otto soon turned his attention to the conflict between the two. In 1904 he published a study of *Naturalism and Religion* (*Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht*) which Sir J. Arthur Thomson translated into English in 1907 as an important contribution to the subject. The claims of religious faith are here defended largely through the medium of a spirited attack upon naturalism itself. A careful analysis of scientific thought at the turn of the century convinced Otto that scientific naturalism left the more significant and meaningful aspects of life and human personality entirely unaccounted for. The roots of religion he found in depths of spiritual experience that completely escape the grasp of natural science.¹¹

This early attempt to validate religious faith increased Otto's interest in the Friesian idealism which Leonard Nelson was just then reviving at Göttingen. In the philosophy of Fries he discovered a convincing, logical and systematic development of the position colorfully suggested but left in romantic ambiguity in Schleiermacher's *Ad-*

⁹ *Die Anschauung vom heiligen Geiste*, pp.48, 96.

¹⁰ *Religious Essays*, *Essay VIII.*

¹¹ cf. *Naturalism and Religion*, pp.43-65, 295-350.

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*dresses on Religion.*¹² For a time, therefore, he gave enthusiastic support to the Neo-Friesian movement inaugurated by Nelson. But gradually the broad historical and psychological analysis of religious experience which he undertook in his later studies forced Otto to modify the Friesian idealism adopted so unreservedly in his early *Philosophy of Religion*. He came to see that Fries, while presenting effectively the rational and moral foundation of religion, had missed the uniquely religious element therein. Influenced at this time also by the thought of Ernst Troeltsch, Otto accordingly in *The Idea of the Holy* substitutes an autonomous religious *Apriori* for the rational *Apriori* upon which Fries had based religious faith.

The concept of religious autonomy, as formulated in *The Idea of the Holy* and developed in Otto's later studies, constitutes his original and enduring contribution to modern theology. Here Schleiermacher's notion of piety, Ritschl's independent religious value-judgment, and Troeltsch's religious *Apriori*, are synthesized in such fashion as to provide an interpretation of religion more discerning and comprehensive than that of any of Otto's predecessors. Only in terms of this principle of religious autonomy, moreover, can the underlying unity and originality of Otto's mature position be appreciated. As depicted in his able historical and psychological analysis there are three essential components of the religious moment of experience: (1) a unique emotional quality of religion in immediate personal experience, by which the specifically religious is unmistakably identified and set apart from moral, aesthetic or intellectual interests; (2) an autonomous religious valuation and interpretation of human life and destiny, similar to our moral and aesthetic judgments of

¹² cf. *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp.15, 23.

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value and equally ultimate and objective in human consciousness; and (3) an intuitive awareness in religious experience of the eternal nature of things, independent of and more basic than the rational scientific description of the universe. The emotional, valuational and cognitive elements which he distinguishes in the religious consciousness are interpreted by Otto as separate but essential aspects of an *a priori* religious category of meaning and value. In the sense of the *numinous*, as he so graphically portrays it, this autonomous religious interpretation and valuation finds immediate emotional expression. In the category of the *holy*, it is given more developed but mediate axiological formulation; religious myth or *ideogram* provides conceptual but necessarily symbolic statement of its cognitive content.

IV

When related to contemporary theological tendencies in Germany, Great Britain and the United States, the timeliness as well as the importance of Otto's interpretation of religion becomes apparent. Humanism has almost completely disappeared from the American theological scene. The semi-humanistic gospel, which for a time seemed destined to become the orthodox dogma of liberal Protestantism, is now hard put to find enthusiastic disciples, and true liberalism in religion has itself been imperiled because of its recent willingness in the garb of "modernism" to make common cause with humanism.

Theologically, humanism was the inevitable outcome of the complete domestication of religion within the limits of human reason. The humanist frankly based his only hope for man's salvation upon human reason, the scientific method, and the "democratic way of life." With

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Max C. Otto he might insist upon an “affirmative atheism,” or with John Dewey he might make some compromise with traditional terminology in the vain hope of achieving *A Common Faith*. But there was no place to be found in his thoroughly rationalistic creed for any sort of supernaturalism or for an autonomous religious experience. The hypothesis of God seemed to be rendered practically unnecessary by the new richness and meaningfulness of life which democracy and industrialism made possible, as well as theoretically untenable by the advance of science. Or so at least the humanist argued, and insisted that the sooner this was generally recognized the better for all concerned.

Now that the social structure upon which the appeal of humanism really depended has collapsed, its spiritual inadequacy stands clearly revealed. It was not a faith capable of weathering the storms of life, and as a religious phenomenon humanism retains today primarily an historical interest. The economic and political crises of our day have effectively revealed the inadequacy not only of the rationalistic theology of the past decades but likewise of the optimistic social gospel which gave it moral dynamic. The social gospel as well as the rationalistic theology of liberal Protestantism in our country must undergo significant modification before it can provide a vital and inspiring faith for the rising generation. Ours is an age disillusioned by a growing awareness of the coercion and brutality inherent in the relations of race to race, nation to nation, and class to class. It cannot recapture the glowing confidence in reason and science which motivated the liberal social gospel, nor find an answer to its deeper spiritual needs in a semi-humanistic faith.

Humanity in the grip of social forces such as those operating in the world today demands of religion some-

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thing much more significant than a rational program of social reform. Human reason alone will lead only to resignation and despair; man desperately needs a supra-rational (supernatural) faith to give purpose and meaning to life in the face of the irrational social destiny with which he is confronted. On every hand evidence is to be seen of the profound effect of the social upheaval of our day upon religious thought. A new supernaturalism is being fashioned to meet the spiritual needs thus revealed just as surely as the appeal of the militant humanism of two decades ago has been destroyed.

The more profound expressions of the new supernaturalism have an obvious social motivation. This is clearly to be seen in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr. The supra-rationalistic faith ably advocated in his *Interpretation of Christian Ethics* and defended in his *The Nature and Destiny of Man* is definitely a response to the demands of the tragic irrationality of our social life so convincingly depicted in his *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. The discerning portrayal of the faith of the modern mystic in Nicolas Berdyaev's *Freedom and the Spirit* is similarly conditioned. Human history, as Berdyaev analyses it in *The Meaning of History*, reveals inescapable frustration as man's only social destiny, a frustration from which religious faith, to be of genuine spiritual significance, must provide salvation in a trans-historical goal.

There are undoubtedly times of crisis in the life of nations and of individuals that throw into bold relief the deeper needs of the human spirit and make available a more penetrating insight into that eternal order of things upon which human destiny depends. Ours is surely such a time and Rudolf Otto's interpretation of religion contains such an insight. Moreover, Otto's discerning portrayal of the

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autonomy of religion has a contribution and needed corrective to make to the new supernaturalism gradually taking shape in British and American theological circles. The ablest exponents of this new supernaturalism, men like Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr, Nicholas Berdyaev, Paul Tillich, John Oman, B. H. Streeter and Charles A. Bennett, all build in some sense upon an autonomous religious consciousness of meaning and value, yet none have defined and validated the autonomy of religion with Otto's precision and comprehensiveness.

The theology of Karl Barth and his followers has had large influence, of course, upon British and American thought in recent years. The emphasis of the Barthian theologians upon the determinative place of crisis in empirical religion and their moving description of the encounter of the presence and power of God in time of crisis has given their thought an appeal and vitality that is understandable in the light of contemporary events. Yet the unwillingness or inability of Barth and his disciples to define the character of the supernatural in convincing philosophical fashion has left their theology without adequate intellectual foundation. It is certainly true that religious faith must have its own independent foundation in human experience. But it is equally true that, without endangering the very independence that it is concerned to maintain, religion cannot scorn the service of reason in establishing its rightful claim upon the human spirit.

Otto's concrete and definitive formulation of the autonomy of religion not only provides a foundation for the new supernaturalism now gaining wide influence in our country. It likewise distinguishes his interpretation of religion effectively from that of Barth and reveals the unmistakable superiority of Otto's position. As a matter of

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fact the Barthian theologians, when identifying the divine initiative in the crises of human life, or the word of God in the Bible, covertly introduce as their criterion of meaning and value just such an autonomous religious category as that recognized and defined by Otto. Until this fact is taken into account and its implications made clear, the "theocentric" theology of Barth must continue to derive its impetus largely from its undefined prophetic quality or from the social distress of his hearers. It can have but limited appeal for those in a position to exercise a less disturbed critical intelligence. On the other hand the influences now at work in British and American theology, enhanced by the stimulus that recent translations of Kierkegaard provide, will certainly themselves lead to greater appreciation of Otto's interpretation of religion and to further clarification of his cardinal insights.

An exposition of Otto's thought along lines suggested in the preceding paragraphs is undertaken in the present study. The genesis and basic significance of the concept of religious autonomy in modern German theology is outlined. Then, by means of a careful analysis of the interpretation of religious autonomy developed by Otto, his own contribution to contemporary theological thought is indicated. His viewpoint is examined in its relationship both to recent British and American philosophy of religion and to the Kantian-Friesian idealism by which he was so largely influenced. And in conclusion the more significant implications of his theory are suggested. Throughout the approach is definitely a sympathetic one. Ambiguities and contradictions in Otto's position have not been overlooked; but the attempt has been made to present its essential features in positive fashion and thereby to preserve so far as possible its original religious appeal and insight.



C H A P T E R I

THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

OTTO'S INTERPRETATION of religion is rooted deeply in the spiritual soil of Germany. His concept of religious autonomy, however timely it may be, can be understood only as the culmination of more than a century of closely-knit theological development that had its beginning in the two creative sources of the modern German mind, the faith of Luther and the philosophy of Kant. To *The Idea of the Holy* every significant movement in modern German theology makes a contribution.

The normative influence of the Lutheran Communion and especially of the thought of Luther himself upon Otto is quite apparent. He professes in so many words to have gained his understanding of religious experience from Luther's treatise, *On the Bondage of the Will*, long before he recognized the specific character of religion in the Old Testament and in the general history of religion,¹ and he constantly quotes Luther to confirm his own position. For a theologian of the Lutheran Church there was, of course, added prestige in an interpretation that could lay claim to the authority of the Great Reformer. This fact may have been an unconscious influence upon him, but in the main Otto's concern with the thought of Luther is too genuine and thorough-going to be seriously questioned.

Luther's cardinal doctrine of salvation by faith does,

¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.103.

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as a matter of fact, exhibit the very features that distinguish Otto's concept of religious autonomy. The discerning portrayal of religion in *The Idea of the Holy* may indeed be seen as largely a more accurate interpretation of insights that Luther knew well in his own personal experience but stated in the conventional terminology of his own day. In addition, however, Otto's theology provides an original and desirable development of the Kantian critical philosophy in which religion is accorded an autonomy comparable to that recognized by Kant in logical, moral and aesthetic judgment.

I

What Christian faith meant to Luther can be appreciated only if Luther's own religious experience is kept clearly in mind. Attention has often been called to the acute sense of dread and terror that pervaded his early religious life. This not only set religion completely apart from all ordinary or secular pursuits, but likewise initiated Luther's insistent search for a new and saving relationship with God. It is hardly convincing to dismiss that quest as mere medieval other-worldliness, or as the naive effort to escape an eternal punishment graphically depicted by the theology of his age. Its enduring contribution to the religious life of the Western world in itself necessitates some more adequate explanation.

As Karl Heim has well suggested, there flashed upon Luther, when as a student he narrowly escaped death in a thunder storm, an understanding of the inexorable boundary by which his own life and all human life is defined.² What he saw was so impressive and disturbing that he

² *The Church of Christ and the Problems of the Day* (Scribners, 1935), pp.50-52.

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could never forget it. It was an insight that completely refashioned his sense of values. It gave him personal and inescapable awareness of the larger, superhuman dimension of existence, and it revealed to him the utter worthlessness of the secular and human when confronted by the eternal.

Luther's sermons abound in vivid and unconventional descriptions of this deeply-felt evaluation of human life.³ Again and again he emphasizes the trepidation and awe that fill the human heart in the presence of God, and for unregenerate man he sees no escape from God's overwhelming might and majesty. But faith in Christ at last provided in Luther's experience the satisfying relation to God that he so ardently sought. Faith and *faith alone* removed the sense of human impotence and unworthiness that had so long oppressed his spirit; it resolved his previous emotional tension, flooding his soul with new joy and peace. His idea of Christian faith is thus no derivative of abstract theological speculation, but an interpretation of deep and living experience. Its initial and concrete meaning lies, moreover, in the domain of feeling rather than of doctrinal theology. Genuine faith is both conditioned and recognized by its unique emotional quality. In *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, for example, Luther graphically describes the mood of joy and exaltation that marks his faith in Christ as uniquely meaningful. This attitude stands in striking contrast to the dread and terror characterizing an unregenerate man's awareness of the Almighty.

Dynamic qualities of feeling thus empirically define the meaning of faith, but they by no means exhaust its

³ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.102-103, where Otto has gathered a number of such statements from Luther's sermons.

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significance. The very nature and essence of faith derives for Luther from its objective reference to a transcendent reality. The vivid emotional aspects of his experience are simply the means by which that religious reality is immediately apprehended. Luther's interpretation of religion as man's deeply-felt relationship to a transcendent world is, of course, in no way unique. This was the cardinal aspect of the orthodox Roman Catholic tradition of his own day. It has been the creative force in vital religion of every age and culture, as Otto himself so forcefully maintains in *The Idea of the Holy*. Seldom, however, have the emotions characterizing man's apprehension of the religious environment been so penetratingly and strikingly portrayed as by Luther, and the Lutheran framework is quite obvious in Otto's description of the *numinous*.

To the eyes of faith, Luther is convinced, there comes a knowledge of God unattainable by the use of reason. Such an independent religious knowledge necessarily implies that man's rational, conceptual knowledge of reality is limited and incomplete. Accordingly Luther insists with characteristic vigor upon the inability of reason to penetrate the depths of reality and provide adequate statement of God's nature. He even permits himself, with what today appears questionable taste, to indulge in violent onslaughts upon the "whore Reason"—an analogy that is quite understandable, however, when one recalls that reason when left to itself so often indulges in *unfaithfulness* to God.

In his treatise, *On the Bondage of the Will*, which is directed especially against the intellectual pretensions of Erasmus, Luther graphically symbolizes the inescapable limitations of human reason by means of his classic con-

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cept of the “hidden God” (*deus absconditus*). Nor was that concept first employed by him in the controversy with Erasmus but, as a distinguished Lutheran scholar has suggested, it belongs at the very center of the Lutheran piety and theology.⁴ Yet the God hidden from reason is not for Luther an unknown God. His own treatise, *On the Bondage of the Will*, itself abounds in positive assertions about God, and Luther states emphatically that it is he, not Erasmus, who is in a position to make such assertions. The attack upon reason simply opens the way for Luther’s recognition of the non-rational and essentially religious insight involved in faith. God, hidden in his majesty from the inquisitive probing of human reason, reveals himself in his Word to the eyes of faith. Faith for Luther involves in some sense an independent apprehension of God and provides access to depths of reality inaccessible to logical inference or rational speculation.⁵

Luther really anticipates here and presents dogmatically in theological terms an essential principle of Kant’s critical philosophy—with one significant difference. For Luther it is from religious not moral experience that man’s deeper insight into the eternal nature of things arises. The epistemological problem raised by this idea of faith, however, did not particularly trouble Luther. He was concerned to proclaim God’s Word as he heard it, not to define a *theory* of religious knowledge, and he did not even attempt to distinguish clearly the criteria by which divine

⁴ E. Seeberg, *Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen, 1929), p.140.

⁵ cf. Otto’s comment here: “The most interesting features in Luther in this connection, however, are the passages upon ‘Faith,’ in which Faith is described as a unique cognitive faculty for the apprehension of divine truth, and as such is contrasted with the ‘natural’ capacities of the Understanding, as elsewhere the ‘Spirit’ is contrasted.” (*The Idea of the Holy*, p.142n.)

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revelation itself is determined. In his experience the Word of God was simply self-authenticating.⁶

Yet the condition upon which an independent religious knowledge is possible, as defined by Luther, constitutes a significant aspect of his concept of faith. It is fallen man, man in sin, who cannot come to know God even by the most profound rational speculation. The unique Christian apprehension of God, on the other hand, is directly conditioned by the transcendent worth and import of salvation. In this experience an essentially religious category of meaning and value finds expression, and Luther's doctrine of "salvation by faith" actually represents an attempt on his part to interpret this autonomous religious consciousness in theological terms.⁷

Indeed in both the conviction of sin and the assurance of salvation Luther recognizes a distinctly religious meaning and value. Sin for him is not primarily a matter of moral delinquency but of wrong relation to God. It is satisfaction and pride in human achievement, a disastrous "humanism" that shuts out both faith in God and the new spiritual life that faith alone makes possible. Salvation, on the other hand, affords the regenerate a transcendent status and worth that Luther terms the "righteousness of faith" to distinguish it completely from the sort of righteousness attainable by moral conduct. In the treatise, *On the Bondage of the Will*, for example, he explicitly contrasts the secular and civil value of the "righteousness of works" with the very different transcendent worth of the right-

⁶ cf. J. Köstlin, *The Theology of Luther* (Eng. trans.), Vol. II, p.226.

⁷ Ritschl emphasizes this aspect of Luther's thought (*Justification and Reconciliation*, pp.212, 392). The position of Luther is described rather fully in Otto's *Religious Essays*, I-III.

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eousness of faith, which consists “not in any works, but in the favour and imputation of God through grace.”⁸

By this distinction between the righteousness of faith and that of works Luther succeeds in recognizing the autonomy of religion without being led to condemn moral goodness as “vice in another garb” (the fallacy into which Augustine fell in a similar attempt to interpret the unique meaning and worth of Christian faith). It is true, of course, that where justification before God is sought through obedience to moral law rather than by faith, Luther does brand good works themselves as sin. But such an attitude toward the *good* is to be understood as arising from the judgment that the good may become a hindrance to what is religiously the *best*. Luther is primarily concerned to make clear that the true goal and the ultimate meaning of life does not lie in mere moral goodness but in a distinctly religious insight and ideal.

Luther’s notion of the righteousness of faith unquestionably involves a religious category of meaning and value completely other than and underivable from a moral or a “scientific” interpretation of experience. There is a fundamental element of religious autonomy latent therein. Faith in its entirety thus designates for him an experience with emotional, cognitive and valuational aspects that set it apart as completely *sui generis*. It contains an insight and produces a conviction which claim to transcend the limits of ordinary intelligence, a claim validated, however, not by rational reflection or logical argument, but rather by an immediate consciousness of self-authenticating meaning and worth.⁹

⁸ On the Bondage of the Will (Eng. trans. London, 1823), p.343. Cf. also A. C. McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant (Scribners, 1917), p.24.

⁹ cf. H. R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (Scribners, 1937), pp.6-7.

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II

From Luther's idea of faith Otto drew the normative principles in accord with which his own interpretation of religion was gradually constructed. He carried also into the domain of theological theory something of the prophetic fervor that animated the Great Reformer. Quite as significant an influence upon his thought, however, is to be found in Friedrich Schleiermacher's famous *Addresses on Religion to its Cultured Despisers*. Schleiermacher's *Addresses*, published in 1799, stand out indeed as the *Magna Charta* of religious autonomy. Their classic presentation of the uniqueness and independence of the religious consciousness has provided the foundation for all subsequent discussion of the subject, and their appeal to Otto is easy to understand.

In these *Addresses* Otto found a sympathetic examination of the same basic religious experience which produced Luther's idea of faith, subjected now to more penetrating analysis by Schleiermacher. He likewise found here an explicit recognition and defense of the autonomy of religion so obviously implied in Luther's theology. In 1899 he published a centennial edition of Schleiermacher's work, and was so considerably and permanently influenced by this volume that it served as the most natural point of departure for his own mature *Idea of the Holy*.

Moreover, it is definitely the youthful Schleiermacher, the enthusiastic spokesman of the Romantic movement, and not Schleiermacher the distinguished theologian of the Reformed Church, who thus stimulated and molded Otto's thought. For in Otto's opinion the initial appeal and force of Schleiermacher's position has largely been lost in his later work. Thus the two later editions of the *Ad-*

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dresses contribute nothing to the original edition, Otto feels, but rather, in the effort to give these *Addresses* an appearance of conformity with the orthodox doctrine of the Church, detract from their freshness, power and literary charm. Likewise, Schleiermacher's great work on *The Christian Faith*, written to provide a more systematic and ecclesiastically acceptable garb for his theology, sacrifices the earlier richness and vividness of his thought without achieving as penetrating a grasp of vital religion as that already suggested in the *Addresses*.¹⁰

To the *Addresses on Religion* in their original form Otto turns, therefore, for the most authentic expression of Schleiermacher's position. Here the author's discerning synthesis of the rich and composite spirit of the early nineteenth century is combined with an enthusiastic insistence upon the independence of religion. The effort prevalent in his day to justify religion either as a peculiar type of knowledge or as a practical way of life and conduct, does not seem to Schleiermacher of great service to the cause thus championed. Piety must rather be freed from all such metaphysical and ethical encumbrances, he feels, and its own independent claim upon the human spirit revealed. Then only will its genuine worth and appeal be appre-

¹⁰ cf. Otto's edition of the *Reden* (5. Auflage, 1926), Intro. p.xii. In accord with the above position Otto chose the original (1799) form of Schleiermacher's work for his centennial edition. J. Oman, in the introduction to his translation of the *Reden*, defends the superiority of the second edition, used as the basis of the English version. He argues in somewhat colorful language that "the Halle professor calmly said I will expound the relations of science, religion and ethics, whereas the Romanticist said passionately I must tear these metaphysical and ethical rags off religion that men may see it undisguised." (Fr. Schleiermacher: *On Religion, Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. London, 1893. Intro., p.xiii.) Beneath his apparent disagreement with Otto's judgment, Oman actually confirms Otto's interpretation of the movement of Schleiermacher's thought.

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ciated, even perhaps by the more sophisticated whose scorn of religion so disturbed the young preacher.

The interpretation of religion in the *Addresses* is quite obviously inspired and dominated by the spirit of the Romantic movement of which Schleiermacher was at the time an ardent member. This movement centered his interest and attention upon the emotional life, gave him a greatly enlarged appreciation of the importance of feeling and inner experience, and likewise helped him become an especially gifted introspective psychologist. Only he who knows religion as it lives within the depths of his own soul is capable of comprehending it, Schleiermacher vigorously maintains. "Religion is of such sort and so rare that whosoever utters anything of it, must necessarily have had it, for nowhere could he have heard it," he writes. "Of all that I praise, all that I feel the true work of religion, you would find little even in the sacred books. To the man who had not himself experienced it, it would be only an arrogance and a folly."¹¹

Empirical religion, as thus immediately known, is for Schleiermacher primarily a matter of feeling. The essence of piety he finds in a vividly-felt awareness of the profundity and unity, the unique worth and import, of the universe. When describing this unique religious awareness of "an Eternal in the temporal," "an Infinite in the finite," he emphasizes especially a profound sense of humility and awe, the inescapable consciousness that one is sustained and directed by an eternal world above and beyond him, as the peculiar characteristic of piety. To designate Schleiermacher's "special class of spiritual impressions that are without doubt purely and genuinely religious,"

¹¹ *Speeches on Religion* (Eng. trans.), p.9.

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Otto has aptly suggested the term, “sense of the Eternal.”¹²

For this psychological concept of piety the *Addresses* are justly renowned, yet this serves only as an introduction to Schleiermacher’s defense of the independence of religion. That defense itself is skillfully conducted in terms derived from the critical philosophy of Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant defines an autonomous sphere of human consciousness in which reason finds theoretical expression. He establishes the validity of scientific knowledge, and posits a unique rational faculty (the understanding) by which such universal and necessary knowledge is formulated.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* he defines a similar autonomy for the categorical imperative of duty and the dictates of the moral consciousness. But both here and in his later work, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, Kant relegates religious faith to a secondary and derived position, taking religion to be only a postulate or implication of the moral life.

At this point Schleiermacher finds the most serious defect in the Kantian philosophy. Religious consciousness in his own experience was as unique and immediately self-authenticating as the principles of theoretical reason or the moral imperative. He attributes to it, therefore, in accord with Kant’s own principles, a similar necessity and independence. “I maintain that in all better souls piety springs necessarily by itself,” he writes; “that a province of its own in the mind belongs to it, in which it has unlimited sway; that it is worthy to animate most profoundly the noblest and best and to be fully accepted and known by them.”¹³

¹² Otto’s edition of the *Reden*, Conclusion, p.xxii.

¹³ *Speeches on Religion*, p.21.

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In developing his semi-Kantian concept of the autonomy of religion Schleiermacher differentiates three fundamental relationships of man to the Universe. One is theoretical: the universe itself, and man's life within it, are here given intelligible interpretation by means of rational law and in terms of a determined sequence of cause and effect relationships. By this theoretical procedure scientific knowledge is obtained and the proper domain of the sciences prescribed. A second relationship to the universe is practical: here man acts as a purposeful agent, molding his world in both its natural and social aspects into an even fuller expression of his own will. With the normative principles of such conduct morality and ethics are directly concerned. But there is also a third independent human relationship to the universe as a whole of which Schleiermacher's Romanticism made him especially conscious: the immediate and vivid awareness in *feeling* of its profundity and unity, its unique worth and import. This relationship involves directly neither the theoretical nor the practical attitude; its significance is not adequately grasped in either scientific knowledge or moral practice. Feeling for the Universe, not cognition or action upon it, provides the true sphere of religion, Schleiermacher maintains, and this feeling finds genuine expression only in piety.¹⁴

By thus defining the meaning and independence of piety in terms of feeling Schleiermacher claims for religion the aspect of experience which to the Romanticism of his day seemed primary and most fruitful. Such a claim appears to him both psychologically sound, as he seeks to discover the empirical nature of religion, and necessary likewise for the vindication of its complete independence. By attrib-

¹⁴ In his *Religious Essays* (VIII) Otto has an excellent analysis of this aspect of Schleiermacher's thought.

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utting to religion the domain of feeling, he accomplishes his initial task of declaring its independence: piety is freed from its subjection to both metaphysics and ethics. It is given a third and distinct province of its own in human experience and its significance described in concrete, empirical fashion.

The realm of feeling, however, has traditionally been accepted as the province of aesthetics. Does Schleiermacher, after all, obtain independence for religion or merely a new tyranny—and perhaps a more dangerous one? He himself was, as a matter of fact, uncomfortably aware at the time of his failure to differentiate clearly the aesthetic and the religious.¹⁵ This was especially disturbing to him since in his own experience he was quite conscious of the peculiar quality of feeling (the awe, humility and dependence) that distinguished man's "sense of the Eternal" from feeling in general. Nevertheless, in accord with his general theory Schleiermacher in the *Addresses* never relinquishes the claim that the entire domain of feeling is the province of religion. He continues to maintain that all deep and moving feeling is in some sense religious, even while he aptly describes the unique emotional quality of the religious consciousness.

In *The Christian Faith*, however, his interest shifts from the defense of the independence of religion to a more direct analysis of empirical religion and its implications. And here he explicitly recognizes that a unique quality of feeling (the feeling of *absolute dependence*) is "the common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feeling."¹⁶ Thus the differentiation of the religious

¹⁵ cf. *Speeches on Religion*, pp.138, 288.

¹⁶ *The Christian Faith* (Eng. trans., Edinburgh, 1928), p.12.

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from the aesthetic, implied but never admitted in the *Addresses*, is finally made clear. Yet by identifying piety with the single feeling of absolute dependence, Schleiermacher sacrifices the richness of his earlier notion of "the sense of the Eternal," and (if Otto's contention in *The Idea of the Holy* is sound) fails also to designate as accurately the essential quality of religious feeling. It is from the *Addresses on Religion* rather than *The Christian Faith*, therefore, that Otto draws his own later concept of the *numinous*.

Schleiermacher's interpretation of piety in terms of feeling, it should be noted, by no means reduces religion to a mere emotional state. The customary description of religious experience in his *Addresses* as man's "intuitions and feelings of the Universe" explicitly includes a direct apprehension of the eternal nature of things together with the characteristic emotional mood in which this insight finds immediate expression. Indeed feeling rather than reason provides for the Romanticist the more dependable grasp of reality, and Schleiermacher's initial interpretation of piety certainly implies as much. But his primary task in the *Addresses*, that of freeing religion from all subjection to metaphysics as well as to ethics, militates against an adequate religious epistemology. The unique religious insight into the nature of reality, which his original conception of religion explicitly recognizes, becomes somewhat embarrassing to him in the face of his continued emphasis upon the essential distinction between piety and knowledge. As a result he gradually discards instead of developing the notion of *intuition* which, along with feeling, had been so fundamental an aspect of his early thought.

Religious experience, as first described in the *Addresses*,

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actually provides man's sole avenue for apprehending the eternal nature of things. Here and here alone the true dimension of reality is grasped. Religion has its source in that primary contact with the universe from which all valid rational interpretation must derive. "It is the first contact of the universal life with an individual. It fills no time and fashions nothing palpable. It is the holy wedlock of the Universe with the incarnate Reason for a creative, productive embrace," Schleiermacher writes in the romantic spirit of his early manhood. "It is immediate, raised above all error and misunderstanding. You lie directly on the bosom of the infinite world. In that moment you are its soul." "If a man is not one with the eternal in the unity of intuition and feeling which is immediate, he remains in the unity of consciousness which is derivative, forever apart." "All is immediately true in religion, for except immediately how could anything arise? But that only is immediate which has not yet passed through the stage of idea, but has grown up purely in feeling."¹⁷

Man's immediate religious insight can then never be given explicit or exhaustive conceptual statement. This insight is an awareness of the Eternal in the temporal, of the Infinite in the finite, and as such is an intuition of transcendent meaning and worth that, for any disciple of Kant, must forever escape the grasp of rational concept and theory. Its formulations differ necessarily and essentially from the sort of knowledge that science and metaphysics provide. The creedal statements of religious faith afford at best a symbolic presentation of truth, and in Schleiermacher's opinion the mistaken effort to treat them as literally true has occasioned most of the unfortunate conflict between the saint and the scientist. In feeling rather

¹⁷ *Speeches on Religion*, pp.43, 40, 54.

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than in concept he finds the deepest and truest expressions of religious insight—in feeling which, even though it gives new unity and purpose to human life, can never be resolved into rational categories.¹⁸ This conviction reveals in its full significance the meaning of his identification of piety with feeling.

Schleiermacher's *Addresses on Religion* thus forcefully present the unique emotional quality of religious experience and defend the independent validity of religious insight. Nevertheless Schleiermacher does not grasp as clearly as does Ritschl, or even Luther for that matter, the essential nature of religious autonomy. For, although the awareness in the temporal of an Eternal, in the finite of an Infinite, finds initial expression in a unique quality of feeling, so likewise do moral and aesthetic judgments. Religious feeling requires more ultimate formulation in terms of its unique value. Schleiermacher's effort to derive religious knowledge directly from religious feeling, without recognizing the dependence of both upon an autonomous religious category of meaning and value, constitutes the gravest defect of his otherwise discerning analysis of empirical religion in the *Addresses*.

To this error is largely due the uncomfortable uncertainty in which the deep convictions of religious faith are finally left, both here and in the more systematic statement of *The Christian Faith*. By a description of the religious consciousness primarily in terms of value rather than of feeling, Otto achieves a desirable reconstruction of Schleiermacher's position without sacrificing its original insights. Through the Ritschlian theology he came to understand the unique *value* of Christian faith, and his

¹⁸ cf. *ibid.*, pp.52, 61, 87, etc.; also *The Christian Faith*, pp.76-78, 194-200.

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own *Idea of the Holy* depends much more directly upon this Ritschlian principle than he likes to admit.

III

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century religious thought in Germany was dominated by the theology of Albrecht Ritschl. This quite naturally occupied a major place in the theological training Otto received during his period at Erlangen and Göttingen.¹⁹ A vigorous reaction against Ritschl took place, however, in the early years of the present century. Otto was swept along by the current mood, and turned from Ritschl to Schleiermacher and Fries as sounder authorities in religion. Yet he learned more from Ritschl than he seems to have realized. Ultimately the ideas suggested by the later influence of Fries and Schleiermacher were synthesized and formulated by him in terms unquestionably Ritschlian in character.

The original features of Ritschl's theology derive as directly as does the faith of Luther or the cardinal principle of Schleiermacher's *Addresses* from an immediate consciousness of the autonomy of religion. Attracted for a time by F. C. Baur's radical school of New Testament criticism at Tübingen, Ritschl soon rebelled against its subordination of Christian faith to Hegelian metaphysics and its failure to defend man's spiritual life against the increasing encroachment of the natural sciences. This protest was motivated largely by practical rather than theoretical interests. Convinced of the incomparable value of Christian faith for life at its best, Ritschl refused to see it made dependent upon a rationalistic metaphysics or a scientific naturalism. The legitimate demands of the sci-

¹⁹ cf. Otto's recognition of the Ritschlian influence upon his early study of Luther (*Das Heilige*, 21. Auflage, p.131n.).

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tific understanding may be met, he felt, without impairing the spiritual autonomy of the Christian consciousness; and he set about the construction of a new theological method with this purpose in mind.

Ritschl's position, like that of Schleiermacher, finds its initial inspiration in the critical philosophy of Kant. Ritschl accepts as both obvious and ultimate the antithesis between the external world of nature and the inner world of moral personality upon which Kant places so much emphasis. But with Schleiermacher he is convinced that religious (Christian) experience affords a dimension of depth to human life, and a solution to its problems, which Kant, because of his erroneous subordination of the religious to the moral, failed to recognize. Schleiermacher's own attempt to safeguard the independence of religion and prevent the dissolution of piety into metaphysical speculation is certainly not without value. Yet in Ritschl's opinion the work of Schleiermacher must largely be done over again; for Schleiermacher's Romantic notion of piety makes religion appear too largely a matter of feeling, while his semi-pantheistic mysticism almost entirely obliterates the unique historical significance of Christianity.

As defined by Ritschl, religious autonomy is primarily a matter of value rather than of feeling. The feeling that distinguishes religious experience possesses no separate province of its own in human consciousness, he points out, but it is rather the product of an independent religious value-judgment.²⁰ Lotze, a colleague of his at Göttingen, had already emphasized the distinction between judgments of fact and judgments of value suggested but not developed in Kant's philosophy. Influenced by Lotze's position,

²⁰ *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Eng. trans., Edinburgh, 1902), pp.198, 200.

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Ritschl is led to identify an autonomous and peculiarly religious judgment of value in which Christian faith finds both its source and its ultimate validation. For him faith in God is thus not merely, as Kant imagined, a necessary postulate of the moral imperative; it is an essential implication of the peculiar Christian consciousness of salvation and blessedness.

It is true, of course, that Ritschl at times writes of religion in decidedly Kantian fashion. He certainly follows Kant in his oft-quoted statement that to resolve "the contradiction in which man finds himself, as both a part of the world of nature and a spiritual personality claiming to dominate nature, . . . religion springs up as faith in super-human spiritual powers, by whose help the power which man possesses of himself is in some way supplemented and elevated into a unity of its own kind which is a match for the pressure of the natural world."²¹ And some of his immediate disciples (Herrmann especially) go much further than Ritschl himself in accepting a semi-Kantian dependence of religious faith upon the moral consciousness.

Ritschl was not so much concerned, as a matter of fact, with theological theory as with the historical content of Christian faith. Accordingly he devotes most of his attention to the latter, and makes no consistent effort to separate the moral from the peculiarly religious elements in the Christian consciousness. But he does make it quite clear that the value-judgments from which historic Christianity derives are no more subordinate to the imperative of the moral consciousness than to the rational principles of scientific metaphysics. In a crucial instance, he definitely distinguishes religious from moral value-judgments and in general accepts the former alone as the ultimate basis

²¹ *ibid.*, p.199.

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of Christian faith, thus claiming for religion the same autonomy that Kant assigned to the moral life. If Kant proposed no more than a moral pragmatism, Ritschl at the very least advocates a pragmatism that is distinctly *religious*. Religious knowledge “cannot be traced back to the conditions which mark the knowledge belonging to the moral will,” he writes, “for there exists religion which goes on without any relation whatever to the moral conduct of life.” “Religious knowledge moves in independent value-judgments which relate to man’s attitude to the world and call forth feelings of pleasure and pain, in which man either enjoys the dominion over the world vouchsafed him by God, or feels grievously the lack of God’s help to that end.”²²

Likewise Ritschl consistently maintains in his constructive Christian theology as a whole, that faith in God rests for the Christian upon a unique consciousness of moral and spiritual triumph, an experience of *blessedness* in the Kingdom of God, rather than upon the universal (but non-Christian) consciousness of moral responsibility.²³ In the blessedness of God’s Kingdom he finds an autonomous religious consciousness of meaning and value (termed already by Luther “the righteousness of faith”), from which all statements of Christian theology are derived. One aspect of such Christian blessedness is a “dominion over the world” that no mere moral achievement can provide. Again and again when attempting to describe what religion is, Ritschl returns to this peculiar Christian sense

²² *ibid.*, p.205. This distinction between the religious value-judgment and the moral is termed by Professor John Baillie, in his own defense of a semi-Kantian theory, “a deplorable curtailment of Ritschl’s true position.” (*The Interpretation of Religion*, p.288). It is the purpose of the present discussion to show that such a distinction is rather an essential aspect of the Ritschlian theology in which an axiological autonomy of religion is primary.

²³ cf. *Justification and Reconciliation*, pp.212-223.

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of dominion over the world and, as has been recently suggested, "one reason he expounds it with such obvious delight is that here he felt himself to be reviving Luther's great message of 'the freedom of a Christian man.'"²⁴

Faith in the divinity of Christ affords an especially striking and unmistakable expression of the religious value-judgment in Ritschl's interpretation. As man's saviour Christ performs a divine redemptive function. Through him the Christian is led into the blessedness of God's Kingdom, and for this reason he has the value of God himself to the Christian community. Apart from this *value-judgment* there is no knowledge of Christ, Ritschl maintains, upon which Christian belief in his divinity can be based. History and psychology, using rational scientific method alone, must inevitably describe Christ as completely human. Hence his opponents in attacking his theory are, as Ritschl well points out, actually seeking to destroy the one sure foundation of the faith they claim to prize so highly.²⁵

A further emphasis upon the autonomy of the religious consciousness is to be seen in Ritschl's attempt to exclude "metaphysics" from theology. There is room for question perhaps as to the soundness of his notion of metaphysics, but no possibility of doubt as to the motive by which he is prompted to exclude it.²⁶ Nothing can be of greater peril to the true interests of faith, as Ritschl clearly sees, than for the Christian to allow himself to be lulled into false security by those who seek through rational speculation to demonstrate the existence of the God in whom he trusts.

²⁴ H. R. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p.171.

²⁵ *Justification and Reconciliation*, pp.392-398.

²⁶ cf. A. E. Garvie, *The Ritschlian Theology* (Edinburgh, 1902), pp.41-47.

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The inadequacy of every such speculative apologetic must sooner or later come to light; and the collapse of this rationalistic theology will seem a severe, if not fatal, blow to Christian faith whenever the Christian, reassured by his confidence in "proofs," has actually lost sight of the independent basis of his faith in Christian experience.

In insisting upon the exclusion of metaphysics from theology Ritschl is seeking, therefore, to safeguard, not to endanger, Christian conviction. This is simply his way of emphasizing the fact that religious "knowledge" has its own independent source and must not be treated as rational speculation concerning a hypothetical "religious object." Such scientific rationalism in religion he customarily identifies with metaphysics; and it is this that he insists upon excluding from the concrete analysis of Christian value-judgments, and from the exposition of the world-view implied in these judgments which he takes to be the proper task of theology.²⁷

That Ritschl himself looks upon religious value-judgments as providing dependable insight into the nature of things, is too apparent in his writing to require detailed verification.²⁸ Likewise he recognizes quite clearly that Christian theology derived from such value-judgments must inevitably come into conflict with a naturalistic metaphysics. He commits himself definitely, if somewhat too sketchily, to the ultimate validity of the insights of Christian faith, both in his great work on *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* and in his later discussion of *Theology and Metaphysics*. "Now we must

²⁷ *Theologie und Metaphysik*, pp.9, 38, 64; cf. *Justification and Reconciliation*, pp.16-20, 24.

²⁸ cf. Otto Ritschl, *Ueber Werthurtheile* (Freiburg, 1895) and Max Reischle, *Werturteile und Glaubensurteile* (Halle, 1900).

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either resign the attempt to comprehend the ground and law of coexistence of nature and spiritual life," he writes, "or we must, to attain our end, acknowledge the Christian conception of God as the truth by which our knowledge of the universe is consummated."²⁹

Thus in the final analysis religious value-judgments possess a theoretical as well as a pragmatic significance which Ritschl can refuse to call "metaphysical" only in view of his own restricted use of that term. Concerned primarily with the concrete historical content of the Christian consciousness, however, he treats the philosophical foundation of his theology much too casually, leaving it fragmentary, incidental and in places inconsistent. Yet he does make it quite clear that the true foundation of Christian faith lies in a unique experience of value and meaning which depends for its validity neither upon the scientific interpretation of the world of nature nor upon our consciousness of moral obligation. This unquestionably constitutes his enduring contribution to the understanding of religious autonomy.

Ample evidence of the penetration and originality of Ritschl's thought is to be seen in its permanent as well as its immediate effect upon the course of German theology. For more than a quarter of a century the issues he raised were matters of constant debate. The leading members of the theological faculties were in a remarkably short time numbered among his disciples, and Otto, like all the more promising younger theologians in Germany at the turn of the century, was deeply influenced by him.

It is to Ritschl himself, moreover, rather than to the later Ritschlian school that Otto is primarily indebted. Wilhelm

²⁹ *Justification and Reconciliation*, p.224; cf. also *ibid.*, pp.203, 222-223, and *Theologie und Metaphysik*, p.64.

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Herrmann, in many ways Ritschl's greatest disciple, can hardly be said to have strengthened his master's statement of the autonomy of religion. For Herrmann, despite his vigorous insistence upon the rights of Christian faith as opposed to the claims of scientific rationalism, follows Kant in treating faith in God as an implication of the moral consciousness. Indeed the portrayal of the origin of faith in Herrmann's *Communion of the Christian with God* leaves a somewhat uneasy feeling that God is a product of the extremity of man's moral need.³⁰ Ritschl's derivation of Christian faith from the *blessedness* of salvation rather than from moral desperation shows a clearer appreciation of both the uniqueness and the independence of the religious consciousness. Nor can Herrmann's more consistent exclusion of all constructive metaphysics from Christian theology be termed a fortunate outgrowth of the Ritschlian position. There was greater need for some sound formulation of the metaphysics implicit in Ritschl's theory.

Otto's doctrine of the autonomy of religion, considered as a development of Ritschl's original insights, is superior to that found in Herrmann's theology. Otto follows Troeltsch and the religio-historical school, to be sure, in their more important modifications of Ritschlianism. The broader historical and psychological study of religion stimulated by this movement revealed Ritschl's idea of the uniqueness of the *Christian* experience to be untenable. The new interest in mysticism aroused thereby likewise supplemented in a desirable way his treatment of religion as essentially social. In both cases the effect upon Otto's thought is obvious. Yet his own idea of the *Holy* as an autonomous religious category of value is based directly

³⁰ cf. J. K. Mozley, *Ritschlianism* (London, 1909), p.47.

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and unmistakably upon Ritschl's concept of the independent religious value-judgment.

IV

Ernst Troeltsch, distinguished theologian of the religio-historical school at the beginning of the present century, outlined a highly suggestive and influential theory of religious autonomy that at many points parallels and anticipates Otto's position. During his years at Göttingen Otto was prominently associated with Troeltsch and Wilhelm Bousset as one of the more radical members of this school.³¹ Much by way of stimulus and direction came to him unquestionably, if perhaps unconsciously, from the writing of Troeltsch. It is, of course, for his idea of the religious *Apriori* that Troeltsch's philosophy of religion is best known; but his "science of religion" in general (*Religionswissenschaft*), with its empirical approach, broad historical and cultural perspective, keen psychological insight and careful philosophical discrimination, has had wide influence upon European theology and greatly enhanced the prestige of the religio-historical movement. Otto might well have learned more from Troeltsch than he actually did while formulating at about the same time his own *Religionswissenschaft*.

Certain philosophical presuppositions inevitably color and largely determine the outcome of every empirical study of religion, Troeltsch points out, no matter how unbiased and "scientific" it may purport to be. Acutely aware of this fact himself, he stresses the necessity of adopting a philosophical position that at least recognizes the *possibility* of

³¹ This fact has recently been reemphasized by one of Otto's former students at Göttingen. See Fr. Delekat, "Rudolf Otto und das Methodenproblem in der heutigen systematischen Theologie." *Die Christl. Welt*, Nr. 1, 1930, p.5.

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spiritual creativity and cognitive validity in religious experience. Otherwise the immediately-felt worth and significance of religion is fore-doomed to repudiation. Thus, for Troeltsch, the hypocrisy implicit in the treatment accorded religion by a naturalistic positivism is quite apparent. Under the guise of an objective, scientific analysis of the phenomena of the religious life, the positivist covertly introduces a naturalistic determinism that leaves no place for genuine creativity or validity in religious experience. Then he pretends to demonstrate psychologically and historically what was actually assumed in advance.³²

Vital religion can agree to no philosophy, Troeltsch maintains, which thus circumscribes and dictates what it may or may not rightfully claim. "The comprehension of religion must retain room for freer action." "It must be possible to analyze religion from within, at the very least approaching it as a completely independent phenomenon, as which indeed it certainly appears."³³ Largely because of this conviction Troeltsch is led to accept a "critical idealism" based upon the philosophy of Kant. His emphasis here is placed, however, not upon "the abstract metaphysical notion of the phenomenality of the world of sense-experience," but rather upon the concrete creativity of the human spirit. As he himself explicitly states, "the significance of the idealistic hypothesis lies in the fact that the self-affirmed independence of the religious consciousness is a possibility upon the basis of such a theory."³⁴

Troeltsch's early interest lay then not so much in metaphysical theory as in the formulation of a sound *Religions-*

³² cf. *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie in der Religionswissenschaft* (1905), pp.8-9; "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft," *Gesammelte Schriften II*, pp.453-460.

³³ *ibid.*, p.458.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.461.

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wissenschaft. Of this “science of religion” he writes: “It is directed toward the analysis of the religious consciousness as an independent form and unique aspect of the creative human consciousness, and toward the task of making clear those intimations of truth and knowledge that appear as a primary content in the phenomenon itself.”³⁵ Such an undertaking must in Troeltsch’s opinion combine the religious empiricism of Schleiermacher with the formal rationalism of Kant.³⁶ It will thus in desirable fashion round out the Kantian “critical philosophy.” A “critique” of the religious consciousness is needed to fill the gap occasioned by Kant’s failure to recognize the autonomy of religious as well as of logical, moral and aesthetic experience.

An empirical psychological and historical comprehension of religion is the necessary foundation of this “science of religion.” Kant himself accepts such an empirical approach as basic to the critical philosophy in general but overlooks it entirely in his own treatment of religion. In the work of Schleiermacher, however, and in William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Troeltsch finds the sort of psychological analysis of religion that he seeks. The essence of religion, as thus empirically ascertained, he takes to be “faith in the vitalizing presence of the divine under definite conditions, wherein the notion of the ‘divine’ itself is necessarily predicated already, together with the *unique religious state of feeling* and attitude of will produced thereby.”³⁷ His description of this religious sentiment (written in 1895) might well be mistaken

³⁵ loc. cit.

³⁶ cf. D. C. Macintosh, “Troeltsch’s Theory of Religious Knowledge,” *American Journal of Theology*, July, 1919, p.276.

³⁷ “Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft,” *G.S.* II, p.492 (italics mine).

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for a quotation from Otto's *Idea of the Holy*: "The mighty and fearful shudder before that which surpasses all understanding and all imagination, the terror and silent fright before the unfathomable, the subjection of the will to something in which one believes but only partially sees, the ardent devotion to that which, advancing upon us out of the impenetrable, yet encourages and strengthens—all this belongs to the very essence of religion."³⁸

Faith in the divine, treated simply as a psychological phenomenon, is found by Troeltsch to possess the same quality of immediate compulsion upon the human mind as logical reflection, moral obligation and aesthetic judgment. The validity of such faith cannot, of course, be determined by an empirical psychology of religion, but only, Troeltsch insists, by a rational religious epistemology of the Kantian type. Kant postulates universal and necessary *a priori* principles of interpretation, inherent in the structure of the mind itself, to account for the compulsion of logical reflection and moral obligation. In general conformity with the Kantian epistemology Troeltsch maintains that a religious *Apriori* is necessary to account for the element of universality and immediate necessity in religious faith. By this *a priori* rational principle in religion, "the subjectivism of the mere psychological phenomenon is transcended," and a universal validity in religious knowledge ascertained.³⁹

That this is only a formal rationalism in religion, Troeltsch is careful to make clear. A "rational" religious *Apriori* by no means involves the subjection of religious faith to the dictates of theoretical reason but only guarantees the autonomy of religion. Accepting all knowledge

³⁸ "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion," *Z.Th.K.*, 1895, p.423.

³⁹ *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie*, pp.24-33.

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as a rational achievement, Troeltsch points out that every epistemological theory must be rationalistic in a general sense if it is to have universal validity. "Of the word 'rational' I have not the fear of so many theologians," he writes. "It implies an autonomous validity and permits the distinction between a theoretical and a non-theoretical validity."⁴⁰

With Kant, moreover, Troeltsch takes the primary task of epistemology to be a convincing validation of the rational necessity and universality of our conceptions. A rational religious epistemology can at best simply "exhibit an *a priori* principle grounded in the nature of reason by which the formulation of religious ideas is determined." It can provide no proof of the existence of that objective spiritual reality toward which religious faith is directed. Such a task falls in the domain of metaphysics, not of epistemology. Troeltsch recognizes accordingly that his "science of religion" must culminate in a metaphysic of religion.⁴¹ In his own later studies, however, he becomes increasingly interested in the historical and social expression of religion, leaving its metaphysical implications not only largely unformulated but decidedly uncertain.

Thus, despite the insight and originality of Troeltsch's philosophy of religion, its results upon closer examination prove somewhat disappointing. From the time of an early article, "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (1895-96), he insisted in desirable and clearcut fashion upon the autonomy of religion. His idea of the religious *A priori* also, when first suggested, aroused great interest, bringing out the youth of Germany with staves and torches to assist in its discovery, as one of his German critics re-

⁴⁰ "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori," *G.S.* II, pp.762-763.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.494, 761-64.

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marked a bit sarcastically and no doubt also a bit enviously. But Troeltsch is never able to determine definitely the content of such a religious *Apriori* nor to provide any concrete religious knowledge thereby. In the end his own "science of religion" does not advance appreciably beyond the "dogmatic agnosticism" of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, which he himself vigorously criticized in the early article mentioned above. He too is forced to accept the practical and symbolic character of all theological doctrine, and to retain in but slightly modified dress the epistemological dilemma of the Kantian philosophy.⁴²

For a time Otto was in general agreement with those who "viewed with alarm" the enthusiasm aroused by Troeltsch's theory of the religious *Apriori*. This was especially true during the period of his enthusiastic acceptance of the philosophy of Fries. His own later interpretation of *the holy* as itself an *a priori* religious category of meaning and value, however, reveals clearly the influence of Troeltsch. There are, to be sure, important modifications in Otto's theory suggested by both the theology of Ritschl and the philosophy of Fries;⁴³ but beyond question Otto derived his idea of the religious *Apriori* originally from the writing of Troeltsch. In his large interest in the phenomena of mysticism, in his historico-psychological approach to theology, and even in the semi-Kantian philosophical idealism which he finally adopts, the influence of Troeltsch is likewise apparent.

The genius of Otto's interpretation of religion lies not merely, however, in his ability to draw together the more significant insights of a century and a half of German

⁴² cf. "The Dogmatics of the 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule,'" *American Journal of Theology*, Jan. 1913, pp.16-18.

⁴³ cf. chapter VI, below.

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theology. It is rather the creative synthesis of the best elements in his religious heritage in a new and profound insight of his own that reveals the originality and penetration of his thought. In his mature concept of the autonomy of religion one finds the vital faith of Luther, the romantic piety of Schleiermacher, and the value-theology of Ritschl fused in an essentially Kantian "critique of the religious consciousness" of the sort proposed by Troeltsch but never actually provided in his "science of religion." This achievement has established for Otto a place of unusual and enduring influence in modern German theology.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The ablest discussion of Otto's place in German thought is found in a series of articles in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* published as a memorial to him soon after his death. (*Rudolf-Otto-Gedächtnisheft, Z. Th. K.*, Jahrig. 19, Heft ½.)



C H A P T E R I I

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O TTO'S INTERPRETATION of religion finds its mature formulation in *The Idea of the Holy*. Here, in terms of his concept of religious autonomy, he draws together the various tendencies to be seen in his earlier studies and lays the foundation for all his later thought. At the outset of the discussion religion is recognized as a unique, permanent and independent endowment of the human spirit. "For if there be any single domain of human experience," Otto writes, "that presents us with something unmistakably specific and unique, peculiar to itself, assuredly it is that of the religious life."¹ Religion originates in nothing other than itself; "religion is itself present at its commencement." It develops into nothing else. And its own nature prescribes the stages through which it passes. Whether in primitive or more profound form, in the mystic or the prophet, in personal or social life, in every case religion makes its appearance as an independent and unique aspect of experience.

An accurate determination of just what constitutes the religious experience and what distinguishes religion from every other human interest is the main concern of all Otto's work. This is a task for which he was especially well-fitted both by the depth of his own spiritual life and by the richness of his religious heritage. Since the days of Schleier-

¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.4.

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macher German theology had been unceasingly concerned with the question, What is the essence of religion? and Otto had this question clearly before him in all his own early studies.

With Schleiermacher, moreover, Otto maintains that only as one is capable of recognizing a unique religious experience in his own life, and directing attention to it there, can he hope to understand its nature. "Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no further" in *The Idea of the Holy*.² For without such an empirical foundation all theoretical discussion of religion is felt by the author to be useless.

To accomplish more effectively the task that he has undertaken Otto finds it advisable to coin a new term for the peculiarly religious "moment" of consciousness. This is necessitated, not by the failure of religion to make its uniqueness immediately felt, but rather because moral and rational meaning has gradually permeated the very concepts (reverence, holiness, sin and salvation) by which the religious experience is ordinarily described and interpreted, and thus to an extent has obscured its essential character. By using a special term, designed to refer exclusively to that in experience which is specifically religious, Otto hopes to ascertain more accurately the nature of religion and also to make possible a clearer recognition of its autonomy. For this purpose he has chosen the term *numinous*, taken from the most general Latin word for deity, *numen*. Both in *The Idea of the Holy* and in all Otto's later studies, that *moment of consciousness or state of mind* which is essentially and exclusively religious in character is described as *numinous*. This unique numinous

² *ibid.*, p.8.

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“moment” or meaning is found in the feeling that identifies all genuine religious experience, in the category of value that is peculiar to religion, and in the very character of the religious object itself.³

Three fundamental elements are distinguished by Otto in the religious consciousness: (1) a qualitatively unique emotional state that always characterizes religious experience (the *sensus numinis*) ; (2) a completely autonomous interpretation and valuation of life and reality in religious experience (the *sacred* or *holy*) ; and (3) an intuitive religious apprehension of the eternal nature of things independent of and transcending our rational understanding (*divination*). Each of these elements is isolated and its nature defined by Otto with fine psychological discrimination and broad historical appreciation. The “phenomenology of religion” thus achieved is unquestionably the most original and striking in modern theology.⁴

In addition to the abundant empirical evidence Otto marshals to substantiate his position, the fact that he has accurately identified the quality of religious emotion is suggested almost as convincingly by the wide popular interest in *The Idea of the Holy* and the immediate adoption of his term, the *numinous*, in scholarly usage. Writing from philosophical, theological and scientific viewpoints, one distinguished author after another has recognized the accuracy of Otto’s concept of numinous feeling and adopted it himself.⁵ It is especially unfortunate, therefore, that

³ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.6-7, 11-12, 53, 56, 61, 62, etc.

⁴ For this general use of “phenomenology” as contrasted with its technical philosophical meaning, cf. D. C. Macintosh, *Religious Realism*, p.328: “Our phenomenology of religion has been simply a historicoc-psychological study without either ontological presuppositions with reference to God or epistemological presuppositions with reference to religious knowledge.”

⁵ Among numerous others the following are representative: C. A.

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Otto's own studies nowhere provide a direct and comprehensive portrayal of the religious sentiment as such. For at this point, rather than in the domain of philosophical theory, his position has been most widely influential. Even in the opening chapters of *The Idea of the Holy*, however, his large interest in the validity of religious faith leads him to fuse and confuse in most unfortunate fashion the description of the religious consciousness itself with consideration of the object to which it refers.

Actually this concern with the ultimate truth of religious conviction would have been more effectively advanced had Otto directly and explicitly analyzed religion as an historico-psychological phenomenon and then set about giving a convincing demonstration of its metaphysical significance. The necessity of so doing has been forcefully put in Höffding's *Philosophy of Religion*. "In any discussion of the significance of religious experience which is to be more than merely superficial," Höffding writes, "it will be at any rate helpful—when not absolutely necessary—to treat the immediately experienced in as great abstraction as possible from the supposed cause. That which is strongly and immediately experienced cannot itself be an illusion. The illusion only arises through a false causal explanation which is confounded with immediate observation."⁶

The care with which this distinction is observed by Troeltsch has given unusual clarity and force to his theory of religion. It is unfortunate that Otto's neo-Friesian ideal-

Bennett, *The Dilemma of Religious Knowledge* (Yale Univ. Press, 1931), pp.7-14; Fr. Heiler, *Prayer* (Eng. trans., Oxford Univ. Press, 1932), pp.7, 36, 54; J. Huxley, *Religion Without Revelation* (Harpers, 1927), pp.113, 161; D. C. Macintosh, *Religious Realism* (Macmillan, 1931), p.307; H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God* (Harpers, 1929), pp.149-159; J. Needham, *The Great Amphibium* (Scribners, 1932), pp.130 ff.

⁶ *op. cit.* (Eng. trans., Macmillan, 1914), p.97.

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ism prevented his appreciation of the procedure adopted by Troeltsch, and caused him to obscure the fundamental distinction between inner experience and objective reality. The present study undertakes, therefore, to disentangle Otto's phenomenological analysis of religion from his comment upon its significance and implications. In this way the excellence and abiding worth of the former is revealed, free from the limitations and inconsistencies of the latter, and at the same time the great importance of Otto's position for contemporary philosophy of religion is itself made clearer.

I

Schleiermacher's concept of piety, as already noted above, serves as the natural point of departure for Otto's interpretation of the *numinous*. In the feeling of "absolute dependence" Schleiermacher identifies a unique and specifically religious quality of feeling, the essence for him of genuine piety. Although recognizing the penetration of Schleiermacher's insight and the permanent validity of his general approach, Otto is concerned in *The Idea of the Holy* to demonstrate the inadequacy of this description of the religious sentiment. In his opinion Schleiermacher's terminology does not describe clearly enough the unique quality of the feeling that characterizes religion. It suggests merely a difference in degree, a distinction between two types of dependence, relative and absolute, and not a difference in intrinsic quality. Some term is necessary that will express more accurately the peculiar transcendent implication of religious feeling, and will differentiate it more completely from all other feeling as well—a differentiation of which Schleiermacher himself was well enough aware, but failed to indicate adequately in his choice of terms.

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More careful analysis of vital religious experience suggests to Otto that the feeling involved therein includes the moment of dependence, but is at the same time something more and distinctly other than mere dependence. "Desiring to give it a name of its own," he writes, "I propose to call it *creature-feeling*. It is the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."⁷ An excellent example of this precise quality of feeling is to be found in the words of Abraham: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Genesis xviii 27). These words do not reflect a sense of *being conditioned*, as of an effect by its cause (*Geschaffenheit*), which Schleiermacher took to be the case in the feeling of "absolute dependence." Rather they reveal a consciousness of *creaturehood* (*Geschöpflichkeit*), Otto urges. "In the one case you have the creature as the work of the divine creative act; in the other, impotence and general nothingness as against overpowering might, dust and ashes as against 'majesty.'"

Such great Biblical passages as the theophany which forms the climax of the book of Job (ch. xiii) and the central chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans (chs. v-vii) reveal with equal clarity this feeling of creaturehood. The heightened religious consciousness of the mystic with its characteristic self-depreciation affords additional evidence of the soundness of Otto's analysis. His later studies in the religion of India serve to confirm it beyond serious question, the theophany of the Bhagavad-Gita (ch. xi) providing an especially noteworthy description of the vivid creature-feeling occasioned by the divine presence.⁸

⁷ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.10; see pp.9-10, 20-21 for discussion of Schleiermacher's position.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp.80, 92, 21, 191.

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This recognition of creature-feeling, rather than the feeling of absolute dependence, as the unique emotional quality of the religious sentiment is actually, however, a championing of Schleiermacher's *Addresses* over against his *Christian Faith*. It does not involve such complete disagreement with Schleiermacher's psychological analysis as is sometimes implied in *The Idea of the Holy*. Some twelve years earlier, when especially enthusiastic over the genius of the *Addresses*, Otto himself had written: "In the feeling of complete humility, in its experience of absolute dependence and conditionedness, the creature becomes conscious of itself as creature, and experiences with full clearness what it means to be a 'creature' and 'created.' " "Schleiermacher has directed our attention anew to the fact that the most profound element in religion is that deep-lying consciousness of all creatures, 'I that am dust and ashes' . . ."⁹

The concept of creature-consciousness is initially then a more accurate account of that "sense of the Eternal" which Schleiermacher describes in the vivid religious empiricism of his *Addresses* but loses sight of in the more abstract theological undertaking of *The Christian Faith*.¹⁰ Basic to this consciousness of creaturehood, however, there is a peculiar disvaluation of the self, an immediately-felt *unworthiness* in the presence of the Transcendent and Eternal. Such a judgment of value is as clear in the general religious attitude reflected in Abraham's words, "I which am but dust and ashes," as in the more precise terminology employed by the great mystics to describe their condemnation of self. At this point the fundamental difference between Schleiermacher's later conception of religion and that developed by Otto is to be found. Religious experience in

⁹ *Naturalism and Religion*, pp.89, 373.

¹⁰ cf. chapter I, section II, above.

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Schleiermacher's hands is essentially a unique moment of self-knowledge; for Otto on the other hand it is the initial expression of an autonomous religious valuation. The feeling of absolute dependence portrays the status of the worshiper in ontological terms; the consciousness of creaturehood measures his status primarily in terms of value.¹¹

In moments of feeling, however, not in categories of value or theological formulas, religion as such first makes its appearance. Historically religious experience has been distinguished by its concern with a reality or environment that is in some sense supernatural, transcendent, divine. But, as Schleiermacher recognized and as Otto convincingly shows, the criterion by which the transcendent or divine is initially identified is the unique emotional quality of the experience itself. This is both more basic to and more consistently characteristic of genuine religion than the intellectual, the ceremonial or the moral criteria that have at times been employed to define it.¹² Thus Schleiermacher's method is completely sound: an analysis of the concrete emotional quality of the religious sentiment must constitute the first step in determining the nature of religion.

II

Such an analysis, an exhaustive and remarkably discerning one, is to be found in Otto's concept of the *sensus numinis*. Its various emotional elements or "moments" are described by him with rare psychological penetration, and its *numinous* quality revealed more and more clearly and in ever wider historical perspective in one study after an-

¹¹ cf. Chas. A. Bennett, "Religion and the Idea of the Holy," *Journal of Philosophy*, Aug. 19, 1926.

¹² cf. especially the essays in *Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen (Sensus Numinis)*, Munich, 1932, and *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.121-128.

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other. As Otto's analysis quite clearly shows, moreover, a unique quality of *transcendence* is the very essence of the "sense of the numinous," a transcendence apprehended immediately in creature-feeling, given more mature formulation in the category of the sacred, and having its cognitive implications stated symbolically in religious myth or *ideogram*. It is thus that the higher spiritual dimension of reality, with which religion is primarily concerned, makes its appearance in human consciousness, and uncompromisingly opposes all man's "natural" or merely human interests.

The concrete emotional quality of numinous feeling is especially clear at the primitive level where, as a matter of fact, Otto himself first distinguished it. His examination of the varied phenomena of primitive religion (magic, the idea of *mana*, the worship of the dead, the notion of demons and spirits, the distinction between clean and unclean, the practices of fetishism and totemism) reveals that in every case the recognition of such experiences as religious is not initially a matter of concept but rather of feeling.¹³ The numinous uncanniness, the peculiar gruesomeness and dread, by which all these experiences are characterized, invariably indicates to primitive man the presence of the religious environment and definitely distinguishes its objects from his "natural" or secular activities. Thus initially man does not say to himself, "I am now being religious," or "These are religious matters with which I am concerned"; it simply *feels* different to respond to an environment religiously than to respond practically or "naturally." Care-

¹³ cf. "The *Sensus Numinis* as the Historical Basis of Religion," *Hibbert Journal*, Jan. and April, 1932 (an English translation by Otto of his essay on Wundt), and *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.15, 121-128. Cf. also R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion* (London, 1914), pp. 13-28.

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ful psychological analysis unquestionably identifies this unique numinous feeling as the primary criterion of the religious experience.¹⁴

Of this feeling Otto writes as follows: "Anyone who is capable of more precise introspection must recognize that the distinction between such a 'dread' and natural fear is not simply one of degree and intensity. The awe or 'dread' may indeed be so overwhelmingly great that it seems to penetrate to the very marrow, making the man's hair bristle and his limbs quake. But it may also steal upon him almost unobserved as the gentlest of agitations, a mere fleeting shadow passing across his mood. It has therefore nothing to do with intensity, and no natural fear passes over into it merely by being intensified."¹⁵

United with the initial moment of numinous awe or dread in creature-feeling Otto distinguishes a second unique emotional element, equally essential and separable only for purposes of psychological analysis: a feeling of "*blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute.*"

This feeling is clearly reflected in the marked sense of the weird and the uncanny so dominant in every aspect of the primitive religious consciousness. The persistence of both the magical and the miraculous in more developed religious experience likewise bears witness to its continued presence. Thus an unmistakable numinous wonder and astonishment is characteristic of all miracle narratives, narratives that attempt to state conceptually what has been so powerfully *felt* in the original experience. Old Testament religion provides excellent expression of such numinous mystery, none more striking perhaps than the weird

¹⁴ cf. J. C. Flower, *The Psychology of Religion* (London, 1927), p.47.

¹⁵ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.16.

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products of the prophet Ezekiel's imagination and the more mature portrayal of religious experience in the book of Job. Otto's studies of mysticism and of religion in India also reveal the basic place of this same unique quality of religious feeling.¹⁶ To the soundness of this analysis distinguished modern mystics themselves bear witness. "Religious experience has its source in vital and immediate contact with ultimate mystery," Nicolas Berdyaev writes. "Only the depths and the heights of the spiritual life deserve the name of mysticism, for it is there that man penetrates to ultimate mystery."¹⁷

Likewise, such a numinous consciousness of mystery is quite apparent in all worship except the merely conventional. Indeed it supplies for Otto the essential aspect of the worship experience itself. Thus the use of obscure terms like Hallelujah, *Kyrie Eleison* and Selah in Christian worship services, of Latin in the Catholic mass, of Sanskrit in the Buddhist ritual in China and Japan, even the use of the "language of the Gods" in the sacrificial rites in Homer, is justified because especially conducive to the sense of mystery, awesome yet beatific, by which immediate recognition of a transcendent religious environment is conditioned. Attempts to eliminate this aspect of worship are accordingly taken by Otto to be fundamentally misguided, for they "leave nothing unaccountable, and for that reason pregnant in meaning . . . in a word, little that is really spiritual."¹⁸

¹⁶ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.26, 66-67, 123, 191-201. Cf. also R. R. Marett, *op. cit.*, pp.13, 23, 25, etc.

¹⁷ *Freedom and the Spirit* (Scribners, 1935), pp.239, 241. Cf. also C. A. Bennett, *The Dilemma of Religious Knowledge*, p.7: "The sense of mystery, in its simplest definition, is the sense of the unseen order, supervening upon, shining through and transfiguring the seen. It is this that is here proposed as the central element in religion."

¹⁸ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.67. Otto's own large contribution to the

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In an earlier work, *Naturalism and Religion*, Otto had already insisted that the religious sentiment, in direct contrast to the dominant rational outlook of the natural sciences, had its foundation in man's profound experience of inescapable and irreducible mystery. "In so far as we are religious," he asks, "do we not sometimes feel a sudden inward recoil from this profane eagerness of science to penetrate into the mystery of things, this desire to have everything intelligible, clear, rational and transparent? This feeling which stirs in us has always existed in all religious minds and will only die with them. And we need not hesitate to say so plainly. For this is the most real characteristic of religion; it seeks depths in things, reaches out towards what is concealed, uncomprehended and mysterious. It is more than humility, it is piety. And piety is experience of mystery."¹⁹

At times this sense of ultimate mystery and wonder in religion is so overwhelming that it gives rise to the idea of God as "wholly-other." In less intense fashion it permeates all consciousness of the presence of deity, and combined with dread or awe constitutes the numinous creature-feeling that so sharply separates the uniquely religious from man's secular or merely human interests. Throughout the entire range of the religious life, from the crudest, least developed types of experience to the exalted and inspiring devotion of saint, mystic and prophet, such numinous creature-feeling persists undiminished. In the more profound experience its character has developed, of course, far beyond primitive daemonic dread and amazement. But Otto is thoroughly convinced that its intrinsic quality is revitalizing of worship through emphasis upon its mystical element is worth noting. (cf. B. E. Meland, *Modern Man's Worship*, Ch. IV.)

¹⁹ op. cit., pp.39-40; cf. also pp.43, 225, etc. The influence of Fries at this point is obvious: cf. chapter V, below.

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never lost nor its pedigree ever belied at any level of expression. By it a transcendent environment is identified as certainly at the higher level of experience as at the lower, and the religious consciousness clearly distinguished from every other human concern.

Few are inclined to question Otto's analysis of the primitive religious sentiment, yet a vigorous attack has been directed against his contention that this numinous feeling is likewise the criterion that distinguishes religious experience even in its noblest forms. "Now Otto is reduced to desperate straits when he tries to make his theory fit the teaching of the New Testament, and especially that of Christ," Canon Streeter writes. "It would seem to follow that the more completely a man becomes a Christian, the less there is of the numinous in his experience of God—a remarkable phenomenon if the numinous is in any sense the *basis* of religion."²⁰

Actually, of course, Otto has examined Christian thought in greater detail than either the primitive or the non-Christian expressions of the religious consciousness. The writings of Luther, according to his own testimony, first familiarized him with the peculiar numinous quality of religious sentiment.²¹ His wide survey of Christian experience likewise quite convincingly disposes of any idea that Christian faith in God as a God of love removes the vivid numinous feeling characteristic of an immediate awareness of His presence.

According to the Synoptic gospels, for example, the unique religious significance of Jesus himself is first recognized by the unmistakable numinous character of his im-

²⁰ *The Buddha and the Christ*, App. II, pp.318, 323. Cf. also J. Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural* (Macmillan, 1931), pp.59-62; and J. Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion*, pp.250-255.

²¹ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.103.

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pact upon the people of his day. The miracle narratives, whatever else their import, furnish abundant proof of the *awe* and *amazement* that everywhere made Jesus a marked man and led his followers to seek a supernatural explanation of his deeds. Especially notable in this connection is the terror he inspired in the demon-possessed. Unquestionably "the nimbus of the numinous surrounded Jesus," to borrow an expressive phrase from Otto's last major work, and it was this rather than any new moral insights that set him apart as uniquely religious in the eyes of his contemporaries.

Jesus' own feeling in his moments of deepest religious experience can naturally never be ascertained for analysis. Yet the remarkable account of that last agony in the garden of Gethsemane, with its explicit record of *sore amazement* and *dread*, certainly justifies Otto's recognition therein of a definitely numinous quality, a shuddering of the creature as he wrestles with the awesome mystery overshadowing even as it reveals the divine. The apocalyptic element in Jesus' teaching, especially as contained in his gospel of the coming Kingdom, likewise reflects the numinous quality of Jesus' own experience. Liberal Christianity in attempting to explain this away as unhistorical has actually indicated its own superficial understanding of vital religious experience, Otto maintains, as well as its inadequate historical methodology.²²

Nor do the more moving and penetrating descriptions of religious experience in later Christian thought show any diminishing of the numinous quality of feeling by which the divine presence is immediately identified. Indeed the spiritual calibre of the men whose testimony Otto has

²² *ibid.*, pp.85, 88; and *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man*, Book I, Chs. 4, 5.

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assembled gives added weight to his own position. Chrysostom, Augustine, Eckhart, and Zinzendorf in particular were as acutely aware of a numinous awe and wonder in their experience of God as were Luther or Schleiermacher, and in their writing portrayed creature-feeling with the same remarkable precision.²³

The moral and rational elements in the Christian conception of God, upon which Otto's critics insist, are indeed of basic importance. But these elements do not provide the criteria by which the presence of God in human experience is immediately and unmistakably identified. If the literature of contemporary Christianity furnishes fewer expressions of numinous creature-feeling, it is not because the presence of God is now recognized by other criteria but rather because of the dominant humanistic character of modern life with its greatly attenuated God-consciousness. Yet today as in the past one feels an unmistakable numinous awe, a distinct consciousness of creaturehood, in great moments of solemn worship. The noblest hymns of the Church and its traditional sacramental rites, whenever vital and effective, continue to make that impression. The spiritual dynamic of Roman Catholic worship, as contrasted with the too-frequent barren rationalism of the ordinary Protestant service, comes unquestionably from the immediately-apprehended numinous character of Catholic worship. And, as a rule, even in forms of Protestant Christianity where the worship experience has (or had) given

²³ cf. Otto's studies of Luther (*The Idea of the Holy*, Ch. XII), of Chrysostom (*ibid.*, App. I), of Augustine (*Religious Essays IX*), of Eckhart (*Mysticism East and West*, A, Ch. VIII), of Zinzendorf (*Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen*, I), as well as those of Schleiermacher already discussed. Zinzendorf, as a matter of fact, not only recognized the unique emotional quality of the religious sentiment, but in a paper read to the synodical assembly of his sect in 1745 even "correctly" termed it the *sensus numinis*.

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place almost entirely to moral exhortation, such consciousness of deity is still apparent. "The popular preacher," as one of Otto's critics suggested, "is not a person who influences by his teaching, but one who, at the highest, makes people *feel* that surely God is in this place, and, at the lowest, creates the impression of something *mysterious* and *awe-inspiring*, which has the emptiness but also the sublimity of the void."²⁴

In his concern to do justice to the deeply-felt uniqueness of the *numinous*, Otto has at times, it is true, introduced a terminology of somewhat questionable desirability. Terms such as *stupor* and *tremor*, which he uses to distinguish the vivid emotional quality of numinous creature-feeling from all ordinary or "natural" feeling, suggest a retrogressive character in religion, despite Otto's frequent insistence that these terms are but analogies. If religion makes of man a *homo stupidus* rather than a *homo sapiens*, as one German critic points out, its results can hardly be considered desirable.²⁵ *Stupor* and *tremor* suggest qualities of creature-feeling dominant at the primitive level of religious development, rather than the uniquely awesome and transcendent character of the *numinous* at every level of its expression. A terminology that adequately portrayed the peculiar emotional quality of the religious sentiment, without creating an undesirable prejudice concerning the nature of holiness, would unquestionably enhance the appeal of Otto's psychology of religion.

²⁴ J. Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural*, p.65 (italics mine). Oman rightly insists that the character of numinous feeling cannot be adequately grasped until its relation to the value of the sacred is made clear. He does not seem to be aware of Otto's recognition of the same fact. (cf. chapter III, below.)

²⁵ Fr. Feigel, *Das Heilige* (Haarlam, 1929), p.49.

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III

In his earlier studies Otto describes the sense of the numinous largely in terms of creature-feeling, and it is this concept of the religious sentiment for which he is best known. Yet such creature-feeling does not comprise the emotional quality of the *numinous* in its entirety. Man's deepest and most meaningful consciousness of deity is characterized also by a pervasive feeling of exaltation and bliss (*Hochgefühl*). Religious experience is concerned with a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, with ultimate mystery that is beatific as well as awesome.

The full import of this aspect of the *numinous* becomes apparent only in Otto's later work on mysticism. His study of mysticism convinced him, Otto writes, that mystic experience contains "religious moments and feeling-content, numinous feelings of exaltation of a powerful sort," which completely shatter any definition of religion such as that proposed by Schleiermacher.²⁶ Thus in the thought of Meister Eckhart, with which his *Mysticism East and West* is largely concerned, Otto finds a feeling of self-exaltation, a titanic pride or "Faustian urge," that must seem an unjustifiable extravagance to a less intense or dynamic Christian consciousness. Something of the quality of numinous transcendence involved here is to be seen in the fact that Eckhart, Christian though he is, can describe the significance of his experience only by means of the typical mystic formula of union, even identity, with God.²⁷

Throughout the entire range of the religious life, moreover, the same quality of emotion in less intense form is

²⁶ *West-Östliche Mystik*, p.259 (Eng. trans., pp.100, 184). Cf. also the emphasis upon the element of fascination and charm in the numinous (*The Idea of the Holy*, pp.31-39).

²⁷ cf. *Mysticism East and West*, Part B, Chs. II, III.

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recognized and its uniqueness insisted upon. To the recent convert and to the saint as well as to the mystic this religious exaltation and bliss is something distinctly different from any non-religious feeling of comfort, joy or happiness, and far more satisfying, no matter how intense these may be. Abundant illustration of this fact has been collected in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, from which Otto himself quotes in *The Idea of the Holy*. Certainly Otto is correct in finding such numinous exaltation and beatitude, which transcends the limits of all normal, natural experience, in every vital and transforming experience of salvation—whether Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or Mohammedan.²⁸ The upshot of the matter has been stated by Charles A. Bennett with his customary pointedness: "Finally, the happiness which salvation brings with it is no mere magnification of natural happiness. Indeed, it is absurd to use such a pale word as happiness to describe anything so vivid and intense. For what religion confers is bliss, bliss unspeakable. *Quae jubilatio!* It is a thing as lyrical in its proper expression as its sources are obscure. The transports of the mystic or of the converted are as unintelligible to the secular mind as the felicity of the lover to the unromantic."²⁹

Religious consciousness actually exhibits then a somewhat paradoxical emotional "polarity."³⁰ The final moment of exaltation is as essential to it as are the earlier moments of creature-feeling, and neither pole ever destroys or entirely supplants the other. Extreme humility and creature-consciousness are indeed as characteristic of the mystic's awareness of deity as is his exaggerated sense of exaltation

²⁸ *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.38, 170; *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, p.127.

²⁹ *The Dilemma of Religious Knowledge*, p.13.

³⁰ cf. *Mysticism East and West*, Part B, Ch. II.

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and self-transcendence which finds adequate expression only in the notion of oneness, even identity with God. Eckhart's doctrine of the *creature*, for example, to which Otto devotes a chapter in his *Mysticism East and West*, is obviously an attempt on his part to interpret conceptually the profound and immediate creature-consciousness that marked his own mystic experience; and humility is repeatedly stressed in Eckhart's writing as the cardinal Christian virtue. Thus humility and creature-feeling on the one hand, and the exaltation of mystic union with God on the other, prove to be necessary emotional poles in Eckhart's religious life; the consciousness of creaturehood being occasioned by an awareness of God's transcendent majesty, the exaltation by the fruition of the mystic's quest for salvation.³¹

Although this fundamental contrast of feeling is most apparent in the mystic consciousness, it is equally basic to all vital religious experience. Augustine has a striking description in his *Confessions* (Book XI. 9) of the polarity of the religious consciousness. "What is that," he asks, "which gleams through me and smites my heart without wounding it? I am both a-shudder and a-glow. A-shudder, in so far as I am unlike it, a-glow in so far as I am like it." The same contrast is clearly reflected also in the central fact of historic Christianity, the Cross of Christ, which Otto appropriately terms "that monogram of the eternal mystery," "the *event* of Golgotha, with its terror and its bliss."³² "It is true even of simple Christian piety," he points out, "that to define it as the feeling of 'complete dependence' is to present only one factor in Christian experience, which gives a false impression if not immediately

³¹ loc. cit.

³² *The Idea of the Holy*, p.177; *Religious Essays*, p.60.

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supplemented by the admission that this complete dependence upon God results at once in the strongest sense of freedom and victory over ‘the world,’ sin, evil and death. A sense of exaltation is the complement of Christian humility, without which the latter is cant.”³³

Thus in his mature account of the religious sentiment Otto combines the awe, humility and dependence of Schleiermacher’s concept of piety with the exaltation of the religious man’s triumph over the world upon which Ritschl placed such stress. It is hardly justifiable then to say, as some critics do, that Otto like the Barthian theologians places undue emphasis upon the “otherness” of God. If the transcendent character of the deity is an essential implication of numinous creature-feeling, man’s kinship with the divine is equally apparent in the incomparable exaltation and bliss that is enjoyed by all who have known what it means to be saved.

IV

Otto’s discerning analysis of the religious sentiment has made a permanent contribution to the psychology of religion. There are important differences, to be sure, between primitive religion and mature religion, prophetic religion and mystic religion, oriental religion and occidental religion. But an identical quality of feeling characterizes the religious consciousness throughout the entire range of its manifestation, distinguishing the religious as such from every other human concern.

This fact is at once apparent in the most representative expressions of every great religious tradition, as Otto’s phenomenology of religion has convincingly shown. William James was also led to this conclusion by his somewhat

³³ *Mysticism East and West*, pp.146-147.

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similar survey of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. "When we survey the whole field of religion," James writes, "we find a great variety in the thoughts that have prevailed there, but the feelings on the one hand and the conduct on the other are almost always the same. . . . This seems to me the first conclusion which we are entitled to draw from the phenomena we have passed in review."³⁴ Höffding in his great work on *The Philosophy of Religion* even more explicitly identifies the common and determinative element in religion as a particular quality of feeling. Such feeling, he insists, "is the essential element in all religions and all religious standpoints. In comparison with it all ideas are subordinate and conditioned."³⁵

Of this characteristic and unique religious feeling, however, neither Höffding nor James provides an adequate delineation. Höffding suggests that "the feeling which is determined by the fate of values in the struggle for existence is the religious feeling," but attempts no further concrete analysis of it. James, because of his general theory of consciousness, fails to draw the almost obvious conclusion to which his empirical analysis of religion points. He bluntly denies the existence of a specific religious sentiment and as a result seeks in vain for some other criterion to identify and distinguish religious experience. Otto's concept of the *numinous* beyond question summarizes the insight into the nature of religious experience toward which the psychology of Höffding and James explicitly points.

Perhaps the most serious psychological objection to Otto's position has been succinctly stated, as a matter of fact, by James himself. James writes that "the moment we are willing to treat the term 'religious sentiment' as a

³⁴ *op. cit.*, p.504.

³⁵ *op. cit.*, p.105; cf. pp.104-107.

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collective name for the many sentiments which *religious objects* may arouse in alternation, we see that it probably contains nothing whatever of a psychologically specific nature. There is religious fear, religious love, religious awe, religious joy, and so forth. But religious love is only man's natural emotion of love directed to a *religious object*; religious fear is only the ordinary fear of commerce, so to speak, the common quaking of the human breast, in so far as the notion of divine retribution may arouse it; religious awe is the same organic thrill which we feel in a forest at twilight, or in a mountain gorge; only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations; and similarly of all the various sentiments which may be called into play in the lives of religious persons. As concrete states of mind, made up of a feeling *plus a specific sort of object*, religious emotions of course are psychic entities distinguishable from other concrete emotions; but there is no ground for assuming a simple, abstract 'religious emotion' to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception.”⁸⁶

Added weight is given to James' contention both because of his initial agreement with Otto as to the central place of feeling in religion and by his authority as an eminent psychologist drawing upon a broad survey of vital religious experience. Yet the rejection of a specific and psychologically distinct religious sentiment introduces an insuperable dilemma into James' psychology of religion. It not only leaves him with no acceptable criterion to identify religious experience, but actually causes him to assume covertly for this purpose the existence of the very sentiment he has denied.

⁸⁶ *op. cit.*, pp.27-28 (italics mine).

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In the above quotation, for example, James mentions repeatedly a “religious object” that determines the quality of religious emotion, yet careful examination of his position reveals no criterion for identifying such religious objects except the unique and specific quality of feeling that the objects in question evoke. His suggested definition of religion, “the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine,” suggests a consciousness of “the divine” as the essential factor in religion. Yet, as James himself at once admits, apprehension of the divine need not involve the *idea* of deity; it simply implies awareness of “an object that is godlike.” What then makes an object “god-like”? In the original experience it is unquestionably the particular quality of emotion that the object itself evokes. This fact is clearly indicated in James’ own later discussion where the specific sentiment by which the religious object is empirically identified is described in language quite in accord with Otto’s concept of the *numinous*. “The divine shall mean for us only such a primal reality as the individual *feels* impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse or a jest,” James writes. “There is a state of mind, *known to religious men but to no others*, in which the will to assert ourselves and hold our own has been displaced by a willingness to close our mouths and *be as nothing* in the floods and water spouts of God.”³⁷

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp.38, 47 (italics mine). Cf. S. Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity*, Vol. II, pp.374-375: “In the developed life cognition and emotion become intertwined, so that the cognition may seem to be primary. But in our original experience it is the emotion which discovers the corresponding object of cognition. Hence it is impossible to explain the religious sentiment as a composite of various emotions, not especially religious, which we feel towards God. For this presupposes that we can begin with a cognition of God and that towards the object so presented we feel these emotions.”

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James' position in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* has been considered in some detail because it illustrates so aptly the psychological dilemma into which one is plunged by the rejection of a specific religious sentiment. The Barthian theology, similar at many points to Otto's interpretation of religion yet so different in its basic methodology, provides another pertinent illustration of this same dilemma. Barth and his colleagues have vigorously attacked Otto's psychology of religion. They condemn him, along with all others who have fallen victim to the "seductive" influence of Schleiermacher, as guilty of introducing into religion a deadly subjectivism and humanism. Concerned to develop a theocentric rather than an anthropocentric theology, the followers of Barth insist upon the primacy of the divine initiative and of divine revelation in religion. Yet actually the dangers of subjectivism are greater in the theology of Barth than in Otto's philosophy. For until some concrete and meaningful criterion is provided in terms of which the transcendent presence and "Word" of God are distinguished in human experience, divine revelation is left simply to the vagaries of individual fancy and religion has no defense against fanaticism. This dilemma the Barthians struggle in vain to escape.

Otto is quite as conscious indeed of the dangers of subjectivism in Schleiermacher's concept of religion as are the followers of Barth, and quite as anxious as they to avoid it. Although he agrees in general with Schleiermacher that religious experience is initially distinguished by a unique quality of feeling, he vigorously attacks the suggestion that this unique religious feeling reveals only a condition of the religious subject, from which the fact of God must itself be reached by inference.

Careful psychological analysis shows such an interpre-

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tation to be exactly the reverse of the true situation, Otto maintains. Religious feeling "in itself indubitably has immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self." "This is so manifestly borne out by experience that it must be about the first thing to force itself upon the notice of psychologists analyzing the facts of religion." To substantiate this contention Otto quotes James' statement in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that "the whole array of our instances leads to a conclusion something like this: It is as if there were in the human consciousness a *sense of reality*, a feeling of *objective presence*, a *perception* of what we may call '*something there*,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed."⁸⁸

The issue involved here is partially at least a question of psychological analysis. Normal sensations of sight, hearing and "feeling" do unquestionably possess such objective reference. This characteristic is so fundamental that only a high degree of sophistication can undermine the conviction that an external, physical world corresponds to these sensations, despite the occasional illusion to which too naive a realism may lead. Is similar reference to a transcendent religious reality, apprehended intuitively in the felt-awareness that precedes all conceptual interpretation, an attribute of religious feeling? Otto writes at times as if convinced that such is the case. The immediate awareness of a "numinous object" in religious experience must be accepted, he maintains, as a primary datum of human consciousness. *Numinous* feeling is the emotional response to man's apprehension of an objective spiritual

⁸⁸ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.10, 10n. Cf. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p.58.

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reality.³⁹ This contention on his part has occasioned much comment, favorable as well as unfavorable. It raises at once, of course, a question as to the cogency of deriving our knowledge of God from an emotional state, however unique. If the convincing objective reference in normal sense perception cannot be accepted as fully valid, but upon critical scientific analysis turns out to be rather largely subjective in character, then certainly the similar problem in religious experience is a serious one.

It is quite clear, however, that Otto does not interpret religious feeling as at all comparable to general sense perception. The sense of the numinous is rather for him the initial expression of an essentially religious category of meaning and value. Thus he writes: "Only where the numen is experienced as present, as in the case of Abraham, or where something of numinous character is felt, to which the mind turns spontaneously, so that *there results an initial application of the category of the numinous to an actual or supposed object*, can creature-feeling arise in the mind as a reflex thereto."⁴⁰ He is almost willing indeed to say that the process of religious interpretation, as it passes beyond the initial stage of pure feeling, "itself invents" its object. But upon second thought he modifies his statement to read: "or, better, discovers the numinous object by rendering explicit the obscure germinal ideas latent in itself."⁴¹ Knowledge of a transcendent religious reality is not simply an outgrowth of the objective reference in numinous feeling. Such feeling does provide an independent insight into the *nature* of the transcendent reality with which religion is concerned, but not an imme-

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.11.

⁴⁰ *Das Heilige*, p.11 (italics mine). The point of this statement is somewhat obscured by the English translator, cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, p.11.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.129-130.

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diate apprehension of the objective existence of that reality. Religious knowledge is rather derived from an independent religious category of interpretation and valuation, and is really an aspect of the idealistic metaphysics that Otto accepts from Fries. The treatment of religious epistemology in *The Idea of the Holy* is not strengthened but confused by Otto's frequent and somewhat misleading references to the "object" immediately apprehended in numinous feeling.

In the numinous state of mind Otto identifies a specific and unique sentiment by which the religious as such is always distinguished in experience. This sentiment, however, is not a completely independent or *a priori* datum, incapable of further psychological explanation, as some of his critics suggest. It is simply the initial and vividly-felt awareness of an autonomous religious category of meaning and value. Otto does vigorously maintain, of course, that religion cannot be explained in terms of components or causes themselves essentially non-religious. But in his own discussion he likewise unquestionably provides further psychological account of the "numinous state of mind" in terms of the category of the value from which it derives.⁴² To offer an *ultimate* explanation of the religious consciousness in terms of a specific and independent religious emotion would relegate the matter to the domain of the psychologist and perhaps justify the criticism that Otto was reviving the already discredited "rel-

⁴² "I . . . speak of a unique numinous category of meaning and valuation and also of a unique numinous state of mind which is always found where the category is applied, that is, where anything is considered a numinous object. Since this category is completely *sui generis*, it, like every absolutely primary datum, can only be discussed and cannot be strictly defined." *Das Heilige*, p.7. Cf. also chapters III and IV, below.

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gious instinct theory.”⁴³ His explanation of the holy in terms of an autonomous religious category of meaning and value, however, certainly does not admit of either inference. Here the philosopher has rightly insisted upon the incompetence of the psychologist as such to render final judgment; and it is here that Otto’s position must be validated or disproved.

⁴³ This point has been most directly made in J. C. Flower’s *Psychology of Religion* (London, 1927). Actually Flower’s criticism is vitiated both by its large dependence upon a somewhat inaccurate rendering in the English translation of the passage quoted in the preceding note and by a general failure to grasp the essential relation of religious feeling to religious value in Otto’s theory. (cf. J. C. Flower, *op. cit.*, App. II.)



C H A P T E R I I I

SANCTITY, SIN AND SALVATION

EXPLICIT RECOGNITION by Otto of the determinative place of the "holy" in religion dates from a Mediterranean trip in 1911. While on that trip he wrote: "I have heard the *Sanctus*, *Sanctus*, *Sanctus* of the cardinals in Saint Peter, the *Swiat*, *Swiat*, *Swiat* in the Kremlin Cathedral, and the *Hagios*, *Hagios*, *Hagios* of the patriarch in Jerusalem. In whatever language they resound, these most sublime words that have ever come from human lips always grip one in the depths of the soul, with a mighty shudder exciting and calling into play the mystery of the other-worldly latent therein."¹ To the comprehensive interpretation of this uniquely religious category of meaning and value Otto's best known and most influential work is devoted.

The relation of the moral and the religious is so fundamental in human experience that moral meaning has become an essential element in the category of the holy. Indeed its moral implications have at times been taken as the real significance of holiness. But Otto's historical and psychological studies of religion make it quite clear that this moral element neither exhausts the meaning of the holy nor even, for that matter, indicates its primary

¹ *Die Christliche Welt*, July 27, 1911, p.709. Otto was undoubtedly familiar at that time with Windelband's influential essay, "Das Heilige," written in 1902. There is no reference to this essay, however, in any of his published works.

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significance. There is a definite “overplus of meaning” in the idea of the holy that is obscured or completely disregarded when the holy is taken to be simply the morally perfect or the perfectly good. This non-moral meaning is unmistakably indicated in the primitive formulations of religious language. Thus, as Otto points out, the original terms used in Greek, Hebrew and Latin to express a distinctly religious interpretation (*ἄγιος*, *qādôsh*, *sanctus*) designate not the morally excellent but rather that which is valued and set apart as peculiarly other than human, or “this-worldly,” in worth and being. Only with the maturing of the religious consciousness is the essential relation of moral conduct to this transcendent religious reference recognized and the complex category of the holy formulated to combine both moral and uniquely religious meaning.²

I

In order to isolate and distinguish more accurately the religious meaning in the idea of the holy (“the holy minus its moral moment”), Otto uses the term “numinous” to describe the independent religious category of value as well as the transcendent quality of religious feeling. “I shall speak then,” he writes, “of a unique ‘numinous’ category of value and of a definitely ‘numinous’ state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied.”³ Fortunately, however, it is not necessary to employ “the numinous” in such a dual sense in English. For the English term *sacred*, for which there is no exact German equivalent, has well preserved this unique religious meaning and value, almost entirely free from the moral element later combined with it in the category of the holy.

² *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.5-6.

³ *ibid.*, p.7.

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In the category of the sacred there is then direct and more developed expression of that unique non-moral moment of meaning contained originally in numinous feeling; in the category of the holy the moral implication of this original religious valuation has become clear. Otto's study has been of real service in calling attention to this significant distinction between the sacred and the holy. As a matter of fact, there has been widespread recognition of the sacred as the primary religious category of meaning and value in influential English studies of religion, both popular and scholarly. Thus in *The Threshold of Religion* R. R. Marett identifies the sacred as the category in which the unique religious interpretations of life and reality is expressed at the primitive level. Julian Huxley, in his advocacy of *Religion Without Revelation*, adopts the sacred as the criterion of a more sophisticated religious experience. And Harry Emerson Fosdick, in his *Adventurous Religion*, reaches the conclusion that the sacred is the heart of popular religion.

Nowhere, however, has this position been more directly stated than in Principal John Oman's discerning study of *The Natural and the Supernatural*. "If we are to have one mark of religion, it could only be this sacred or absolute valuation," he writes: "and, on the whole, it fairly adequately satisfies the requirement. Everything that is sacred is in the sphere of religion, and everything in the sphere of religion is sacred. Unless dogmas express beliefs valued as sacred, they are mere intellectual formulas; unless rites are the worship of a power valued as sacred, they are mere social conventions; unless God himself embody all we value as sacred he is a mere metaphysical hypothesis."⁴

⁴ *op. cit.*, p.69, cf. pp.59-69. The interpretation of the *sacred* by these

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It is quite evident in *Das Heilige* that Otto has the *sacred* in mind as the “numinous” category of value to which he refers, but this fact could have been made clearer in the English translation of his work. Thus in chapter ten of the original German, entitled, “Das sanctum als numinoser Wert,” the Latin *sanctus* is consistently employed to designate the religious category of interpretation in which there is no developed moral meaning. When describing that which is uniquely religious in experience, Otto here avoids entirely the use of the German term, *das Heilige*, with its dual moral and religious significance, and emphasizes the contrast between the complex category of the holy and the simple religious category of the sacred. “This *sanctus*,” he states explicitly, “is not ‘perfect,’ nor ‘beautiful,’ nor ‘sublime,’ nor ‘good,’ although it has a definite and perceptible analogy to these terms. It is similarly a value, indeed an objective, ultimate and eternal value. It is the *numinous* value.”⁵

Such an autonomous religious category has been consistently employed in the whole course of human thought to interpret the deepest significance of man’s experience. To portray its nature adequately Otto has assembled a writers, is, of course, not identical with Otto’s in every respect, but provides ample confirmation of his position.

⁵ *Das Heilige*, p.69; cf. the Eng. trans., p.53. The English translation of the chapter title quoted above, “The Holy as a Category of Value” (*The Idea of the Holy*, Ch. VIII), completely obscures the distinction that Otto is making here by use of the Latin *sanctus* instead of the German *das Heilige*. In the body of the chapter, also *sanctus* and *sanctitas* are rendered as “holy” and “holiness” in the crucial passages where Otto is describing the specific religious valuation which does not involve the moral element in the category of the holy. The appended explanation by the English translator of his choice of the holy rather than the sacred, as a general term to be employed throughout, reveals this same failure on his part to appreciate the real significance of Otto’s distinction between the holy and the sacred. (cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, App. X.)

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large body of empirical evidence both in *The Idea of the Holy* and in his later studies. Thus vivid creature-feeling, marking primitive man's experience of overwhelming might and unfathomable mystery in natural phenomena, contains a latent but unmistakable consciousness of uniquely religious meaning and value. As this profoundly-felt meaning gradually finds expression not only in the domain of feeling but also in a specific category of its own, the central aspects of the religious environment come to be revered as *sacred*. Such phenomena are thus definitely set apart in dignity and worth (in *augustness*, Otto suggests) from all that is merely human, secular, or profane.⁶

This religious interpretation of nature's profound mystery and awesome majesty is expressed in especially revealing fashion in the Old Testament book of Job. As portrayed in the magnificent theophany with which that drama comes to an end, Job is acutely aware of an intrinsic sanctity in the awesome might and mystery of the universe by which he is overwhelmed. It is here indeed that Job's solution of the problem of unmerited suffering is to be found. For in Otto's opinion the book of Job does not proclaim the impossibility of a "theodicy," as has often been suggested; but in dramatic fashion, rather than in terms of theological theory, it presents the truly religious answer to this problem. What brings peace to the soul of Job and justifies God in his sight is not a moral or rational answer to the question that perplexes him. It is rather an immediate consciousness of transcendent meaning and value in the might and mystery of the universe, an experience of sanctity incomprehensible and overwhelming yet unutterably satisfying.⁷

⁶ *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.53-54.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.83.

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With profound insight this Old Testament author has perceived the only "solution" of the problem of evil, Otto maintains, a problem itself arising in most acute form from the ultimate inscrutability and crushing might of the natural universe. The Christian interpretation of the Cross of Christ is simply a nobler expression of the same religious insight dramatically portrayed in the book of Job. Nowhere in human history does the awesome mystery of the Eternal on the one hand, and the sublimity of moral heroism on the other, stand so clearly revealed as on Golgotha. Otto is certainly justified in his conclusion that "in applying to the Cross of Christ the category 'holy,' Christian religious feeling has given birth to a religious intuition profounder and more vital than any to be found in the history of religion."⁸

In the category of the holy, as thus employed in the mature Christian consciousness, there is unmistakable evidence of a numinous sanctity apprehended immediately in creature-feeling. But there is also an important moral aspect therein, whether the category be applied to human personality or to cosmic process. Something of divine moral purpose or of finite moral heroism has been incorporated as an essential component in the holy, which the sacred in itself does not necessarily contain. The recognition of an event, historical process or person as sacred *or* holy is obviously much akin, moreover, to the appreciation of a great work of art as beautiful. It is an interpretation of meaning and value, based upon the immediately-felt significance or character of the phenomenon as a whole, rather than a conclusion deduced by logical reasoning from clearly conceived premises.

The nature of such religious judgment is well exempli-

⁸ *ibid.*, p.177.

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fied in the Christian interpretation of Jesus. Otto's discerning portrayal of this central Christian insight deserves to be quoted in full. "Whoever sinks in contemplation of that great connected development of the Judaic religion which we speak of as the 'old covenant up to Christ,'" he writes, "must feel the stirrings of an intimation that something Eternal is there, directing and sustaining it and urging it to its consummation. The impression is simply irresistible. And whoever then goes on to consider how greatly the scene is set for the completion of the whole story, and the mighty stature of the personality that is its fulfilment, his firm unfaltering hold upon God, his unwavering, unfailing righteousness, his certitude of conviction and assurance in action so mysterious and profound, his spiritual fervour and beatitude, the struggles and trustfulness, self-surrender and suffering, and finally the conqueror's death that were his—whoever goes on to consider all this *must* inevitably conclude: That is divine, that is the holy."⁹

One "must inevitably conclude" that he has thus met with the holy, however, only when his religious appreciation is sufficiently mature and profound. It is not the necessary outcome of rational analysis.¹⁰ As in the case of aesthetic appreciation, there is in the beginning a rather wide diversity in man's judgments of sanctity. But this is only true in both cases, Otto maintains, of the immature, the crude and undeveloped judgment. With breadth of experience and profoundness of insight, one finds a growing uniformity in the appreciation and interpretation of beauty and of sacredness as well. What was once accepted by the individual and by the race in art, music or nature as

⁹ *Das Heilige*, p.213; cf. the Eng. trans. p.174.

¹⁰ *loc. cit.*

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beautiful is later rejected; what was once accepted in nature or in life as sacred is later disregarded. And a higher form of sanctity as of beauty is recognized in its place. Yet the aesthetic and religious categories of meaning and value are not themselves invalidated; they are merely understood more clearly and applied with greater finality. As William Temple, late Archbishop of Canterbury, has pointed out, "It takes longer for the aesthetic judgment to become stable than for the scientific, but when it reaches stability it also achieves finality as the other does not."¹¹ The same is true, he might also have added, of the religious judgment as well.

In this interpretation of the sacred Otto escapes the essential weakness of the older statements of supernaturalism. The defenders of certain types of supernaturalism made the error of supposing that a "natural" or scientific explanation of events in nature and history destroyed their religious significance. Such theories are themselves "solidly rationalistic," Otto contends, and not true to the genius of religious faith. They are not only a real hindrance to scientific progress; but also leave religion itself forever at the mercy of an advancing science, and even more unfortunately they treat religious faith as logically demonstrable, thus necessitating the futile search for a *religious* rather than a natural cause of natural phenomena. The religious judgment, Otto writes, "has nothing whatever to do with natural law and the relation or lack of relation to it of something experienced. It is not concerned at all with the way in which a phenomenon—be it event, person, or thing—came into existence, but with what it means, that is, with its significance as a 'sign' of the

¹¹ *Nature, Man and God* (Macmillan, 1934), p.159. Cf. also *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.147, 148, 153.

¹² *ibid.*, p.149.

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holy.”¹² Judgment of this sort is clearly not a matter of logical analysis but rather of maturity of insight and appreciation of value.

II

In man’s consciousness of sin and his assurance of salvation there is further significant expression of the autonomous religious judgment so clearly revealed in the sense of sanctity. An interpretation of sin in such terms is merely suggested in *The Idea of the Holy*. But penetrating analysis of the meaning of sin is provided by Otto in four essays, which were initially appended to the later German editions of *Das Heilige* and afterwards given central place in a volume of essays entitled *Sin and Original Guilt*.¹³ The conviction of sin is understandable, Otto maintains, only as a specifically religious interpretation of human nature and experience. To interpret sin as completely non-moral would certainly not be in accord with the facts of the religious life. There is a significant moral element in the developed sense of sin, an element indeed that has often been taken by the moralist as the measure of its depth and profoundness. In his essay, “What is Sin,” however, Otto convincingly shows that this moral aspect of sin is neither its initial nor its determinative element. The sinful must rather be recognized as “the obverse of the holy,” that is as the *infringement or antithesis* of a unique religious consciousness of meaning and value.¹⁴

The sense of sin derives originally from the evaluation

¹² *Sünde und Urschuld*, Gotha, 1929. These essays were included earlier in Otto’s *Aufsätze das Numinose Betreffend* (Gotha, 1928), and are translated in the English volume of Otto’s *Religious Essays* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1931): I. What is Sin; II. The Battle Between Flesh and Spirit; III. The Christian Idea of “Lostness”; IV. The Religious Idea of Original Guilt.

¹⁴ *Religious Essays*, p.1.

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of man's character, indeed of his very humanity, contained in the vivid consciousness of creaturehood so basic to the *sensus numinis*. This evaluation is negative in character but none the less profound. Analysis of the dictates of conscience and the moral judgment reveals that the initial consciousness of moral obligation, of duty and the good, is often of this negative sort. Thus in the uneasy conscience certain actions, whether contemplated or performed, may be felt to be wrong prior to any clear sense of what is right or good. Similarly in the religious life, man's awareness of his own creaturehood and profaneness (when confronted in experience with that which possesses numinous sanctity) seems to be as immediate as his recognition of the sacredness of the religious environment itself.

In this peculiarly religious judgment Otto identifies a profound and unique self-disvaluation. This is a self-disvaluation that finds initial expression simply in the unique emotional quality of creature-feeling already discussed; but with the gradual maturing of the religious consciousness, a separate religious category of meaning and value (essential profaneness, lostness, sin) is soon formulated to express its meaning. Two Biblical passages afford especially clear illustration of spontaneous religious self-disvaluation that has barely passed beyond the stage of pure feeling: the words of Isaiah upon his vivid experience of the holiness of Jehovah: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of *unclean* lips and I dwell among a people of *unclean* lips"; and Peter's cry, when confronted by the holy in the person of Jesus: "Depart from me, for I am a *sinful* man, O Lord."¹⁵

There is to be observed here, Otto points out, a meaning that no moral interpretation of conduct can explain, so

¹⁵ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, p.52.

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distinct indeed from the purely moral as often to be condemned by the moralist as bad. Thus a rationalistic morality, however genuinely concerned it is with the attainment of high moral character and ideal of life, can never understand the religious man's consciousness of sin and guilt, nor his longing for redemption. The moralist may even condemn this as a hindrance to needed self-respect and so to moral improvement. The ideal of the Greek moralist, for example, carries with it none of the unique self-disvaluation basic to the Hebrew sense of sin. Here one finds the fundamental and unmistakable contrast between the moral philosophy of Plato and St. Paul's religious view of life. It is the status of man as such, not merely his conduct, that is evaluated in the consciousness of sin. Nor can man's status as thus revealed in creature-feeling be changed by any effort after moral self-improvement, however earnest or sincere. "It follows from what has been said," Otto writes, "that sin is profaneness. It is not to possess God. It is godlessness, a godlessness attaching to the creature's disinclination to the possession of God and by God in faith. This state of sin is simply and primarily a condition inherent in the natural being of man as such."¹⁸

Otto's psychological and theological description of sin has been restated in more penetrating philosophical fashion by Reinhold Niebuhr. "The sense of sin," Niebuhr agrees, "is peculiarly the product of religious imagination, as the critics of religion quite rightly maintain. It is the consequence of measuring life in its total dimension and discovering the self both related to and separated from life in its essence." "Thus when life is seen in its total dimension, the sense of God and the sense of sin are involved in

¹⁸ *Sünde und Urschuld*, p.208; cf. the Eng. trans., p.25.

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the same act of self-consciousness; for to be self-conscious is to see the self as a finite object separated from essential reality; but also related to it, or there could be no knowledge of separation.”¹⁷

In such religious ideas as original guilt and the “lost” condition of the unregenerate, the character of this uniquely religious evaluation of human nature is quite clearly revealed. Terms like “unsaved” or “lost,” although now somewhat hackneyed, were originally highly significant expressions of religious conviction. The effort to interpret their meaning in moral terms only produces confusion and inevitably ends in failure. Thus Augustine’s attempt to give a moral interpretation to the “lost” condition of the pagan world excellently illustrates the futility of that approach. For this identification of “wholly lost in sin” with moral depravity leads, as Otto points out, to “his fatal disparagement of moral effort as such, where it occurs outside the bounds of Christianity, his endeavor to explain all non-Christian benevolence as disguised self-love, to stigmatize all pure devotion to a cause and to the service of one’s country as *splendida vitia*.¹⁸ As a consequence, Augustine’s real purpose (the portrayal of the unique worth of Christian faith) was defeated because of this obvious confusion in his treatment of the moral life. That confusion, moreover, was a direct result of his failure to distinguish the moral from the purely religious meaning in the sense of sin and the idea of “lostness.”

The religious insight of Luther in this connection is far

¹⁷ *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Harpers, 1935), pp.65, 57. In his later work, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I, ch. 7-8, Niebuhr adduces abundant evidence to validate the unique religious consciousness of creaturehood with its consequent self-disvaluation and sense of sinfulness.

¹⁸ *Religious Essays*, p.17.

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superior to that of Augustine. "It is not 'freedom from carnality' or any other moralistic aim that Luther regards as the primary and valid ideal in which man finds the meaning of existence and his true being," Otto writes. Briefly stated, "it is that a man should possess God, that he should be 'pious' before God."¹⁹ This essentially religious ideal of life Luther terms "the righteousness of faith," and it is such transcendent worth, rather than the moral and civil righteousness of good works, that is in his opinion forever "lost" by the unregenerate.

Upon the insight of Luther Otto bases his own interpretation of "lostness." The condition of the lost is for him the state of the "natural" man, marked by an absence of that unique consciousness of worth and dignity known only in vital religious faith. This lost condition is immediately recognized as a deeply-felt creaturehood and profaneness which moral effort alone can never remedy, a profaneness debarring the sinner from that at-oneness with God which faith alone makes possible. Thus the idea of "lostness" gives expression to a peculiarly religious judgment. It is an evaluation of the ordinary values of life themselves as utterly worthless and undesirable in comparison with "the state of holiness or belonging to God."²⁰

This interpretation of human nature and destiny is, moreover, not only a uniquely religious but essentially a retrospective judgment. Only after man's awareness of the incomparable worth of holiness can all that has gone before, all non-religious satisfaction in general, be recognized by comparison as essentially worthless. From this vantage point even moral goodness itself appears finally inade-

¹⁹ *Sünde und Urschuld*, pp.201-202; cf. the Eng. trans., p.19 and also chapter I, section I, below.

²⁰ *Religious Essays* III: "The Christian Idea of Lostness," pp.23-24.

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quate. It may indeed become a real hindrance to the highest ideal of the spirit and so itself seem sinful, when set up as a rival way of salvation, as seen, for example, in the reaction of orthodox Christianity to the creed of the humanist. This limitation of a purely moral ideal of life was vividly experienced by St. Paul. His retrospective evaluation of the moral law as compared with the higher religious ideal is strikingly expressed in the familiar words, "I count it all as dross."

Only in the ideas of original sin and guilt, however, does the full force of man's religious self-disvaluation become clear. These ideas, so prominent in the more dynamic periods of Christianity, are not the product of abstract theological theory but reflect man's immediate consciousness of his own "natural" profaneness and unworthiness, Otto points out. Nor is this sense of unworthiness occasioned by any individual transgression or moral delinquency. It attaches to man's very nature as *creature*, which in itself renders him profane, "wholly-other" than the sacred. In this sense sin is inherent in human nature itself, attaching to man as man, to each individual as a human being. It is not a matter of moral conduct, but a more fundamental state of being by which the ultimate worth of all morality is itself conditioned.

The theological doctrine of original sin is simply an effort to state conceptually the implications of this deeply-felt religious self-disvaluation. More effective statement of the meaning of sin has been given in symbolic form in the Hebrew-Christian account of the fall of man. That account preserves intact the sense of guilt and personal responsibility, which is as basic to the religious as to the moral consciousness. Just as man's conscience places upon him as an individual the responsibility for his moral short-

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comings and *blames* him for the failure to perform his duty, so his religious self-disvaluation holds him *guilty* of the very profaneness that bars him from the holy. And this is rightly termed an “original guilt” in the sense that it results from no individual acts or attitudes but conditions his human nature as such. Efforts to explain such distinctly religious self-disvaluation in evolutionary or sociological terms, moreover, in Otto’s opinion inevitably explain *away* its deepest significance. The religious judgment involves an insight into the ultimate and eternal nature of things which transcends the phenomenal world of rational understanding and which only a symbolic statement can effectively portray.²¹

That a unique and autonomous category of self-disvaluation is fundamental to every phase of the religious consciousness, Otto’s comprehensive examination of religion clearly indicates. This, moreover, is a judgment similar in nature to man’s recognition of sanctity or holiness in the natural universe. Both judgments find immediate concrete expression in numinous creature-feeling and more developed formulation in some specifically religious category of interpretation and valuation. In the one case, however, there is positive religious interpretation of an absolute meaning and worth apprehended in the world of nature and human history; in the other, negative religious evaluation of the self as phenomenal object.

III

The primary moment of the *numinous*, that vivid awareness by the creature of his own unworthiness in the presence

²¹ *Religious Essays* IV: “The Religious Idea of Original Guilt,” pp.26, 28. Cf. also Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, pp.72-97.

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of that which he recognizes as sacred or holy, involves also an urge to escape the impotence and profaneness of finite human existence. Thus in the very birth of religion the quest for salvation begins. At the primitive level this quest occasions man's crude endeavor to possess for his own purposes the strange "numinous" power of which he has become acutely conscious. At a mature level of religious aspiration the same ideal is strikingly formulated in the Old Testament imperative, "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy."

Man's persistent effort to achieve salvation is for Otto the most significant aspect of the history of religion. "If one desires to know what religion is," he writes, "it is not enough to turn to speculation, however sagacious and profound, or to definitions of the 'absolute' in this or that sense, but he must turn to the longing, peculiar to religion, which the 'rational' man necessarily thinks quite fantastic, the longing after this utterly 'irrational' and infinite good which is 'salvation.' " "To speak of a 'religion of redemption' is, one may say, to be guilty of a redundancy, at any rate if we are considering the more highly developed forms of religion. For every religion, when once it has won its autonomy and freed itself from dependent reference to an ideal of merely worldly 'welfare' (*εὐδαιμονία*), whether public or private, develops in itself unique and overbounding ideals of beatitude which may be designated by the general term 'salvation.' "²²

The assurance of salvation, then, Otto cites as a third uniquely religious recognition of meaning and value in human experience. "Whatever its content may be, salvation is a peculiar value which is sought and striven after

²² *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, pp.13-14; *The Idea of the Holy*, p.170.

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for its own sake," he maintains.²³ Whether termed atonement, redemption or salvation, this category of interpretation and valuation holds a central place in the theology of every great religion. Only in such terms indeed can the ultimate goal and achievement of the religious life be made intelligible. The large emphasis in all Otto's major works upon man's positive and deeply-felt experience of *religious* value in salvation reveals unmistakably the influence of the Ritschian theology. There is in his discussion, however, a clarification of the nature of this independent religious value-judgment which Ritschl had done little more than identify.

Unequivocal expression of such a uniquely religious judgment of value is to be seen in the Old Testament idea of "atonement." Atonement designates a fundamental transformation in man's worth and status deriving directly from a new relation to the deity. The origin of this Hebrew concept Otto traces back to the need felt for a "covering" or shield against the wrath of the deity, so evident in the early "religion of Yahweh."²⁴ Overwhelmed by his own profaneness and unworthiness, the sinner sought a covering or protection in certain specific rites which were only later interpreted as acts of moral consecration. But these rites, and the spirit that promoted them, established a new relation to Yahweh through which man's "natural" profaneness was overcome. Not only did the sinner himself recognize his changed status in the vibrant rapture and bliss of such an experience; he was often for the same reason set apart by his fellows as a "holy man." This peculiarly religious category of interpretation and valua-

²³ *Mysticism East and West*, p.188. Cf. also *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.228.

²⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.56.

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tion, which finds initial expression in the unique feeling of exaltation already identified in the *numinous*, provides the historical basis of the idea of atonement. With the maturing of the religious judgment a moral element is recognized by Hebrew thought as essential in the atonement experience but only as a secondary, never as its primary, aspect.

The unique religious significance of atonement in the Old Testament lies then in the fact that the sinner thereby in some fashion beyond his comprehension is enabled to rise above his own finiteness and to participate in the transcendent worth and dignity, indeed in the very holiness, of God. It is obvious, moreover, that holiness here designates primarily the new status of the individual, the abiding dignity and worth of the transformed human spirit, and not the quality of his moral life.

Perhaps nowhere in religious literature is there a more profound concept of holiness than in the book of the prophet Isaiah. In analyzing Isaiah's thought, Otto finds that for this Old Testament prophet the very essence of Israel's holiness "is incorporated in the higher idea of being a people of Yahweh, appropriated to Yahweh, a sanctified (*geheiligter*) group withdrawn from the world." "To be permitted to be the people of Yahweh (in this sense) is in itself inconceivable and unsurpassable salvation for that people itself, a precious and blessed good such as nothing else can afford," Otto writes of Isaiah's conception.²⁵ The category of the holy thus expresses for Isaiah a peculiarly religious evaluation of man's status in which a unique transcendent reference is not only obvious but essential.

²⁵ *Sinde und Urschuld*, p.151; cf. the Eng. trans., "The Prophets' Experience of God," *Religious Essays* V, pp.41, 42.

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In the Christian consciousness of salvation an autonomous religious category of value has likewise been determinative. The uniqueness as well as the cardinal importance of salvation in traditional Christian experience finds forceful theological expression in the doctrine that only through Christ can man be saved. This is a major item in the historic Christian creed, yet one which the more rational and attenuated faith of liberal Protestantism has not been able to comprehend. The concept of the Kingdom of God in primitive Christianity likewise expressed unmistakably the autonomous and transcendent ideal basic to the Christian notion of salvation. Repeatedly Otto stresses the inadequacy of recent attempts to interpret the Kingdom in merely moral, social or "natural" categories. Such categories inevitably fail to portray the unique, transcendent and "wholly other" religious meaning and value that the concept of the Kingdom originally expressed. Interpretations of the Kingdom of God as merely an ideal *human* society do not incorporate this essential element, and thus actually destroy the *religious* character of the traditional Christian notion. On the other hand, that aspect of the idea of the Kingdom is effectively symbolized in the eschatological categories basic to the thought of Jesus and the primitive Christian Church.²⁶

The transcendent worth of God's Kingdom is so much greater, moreover, than the ordinary or "natural" values of life that it renders these insignificant and unappealing by comparison. Jesus' Kingdom parables, especially the parable of the treasure hid in the field and of the pearl of great price, point unmistakably to this fact. The Kingdom

²⁶ In his last major work, *The Kingdom of God and The Son of Man* (1934), Otto stresses particularly the religious character of the eschatology in which the New Testament concept of the Kingdom is described.

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is here recognized, to use Otto's language, as "the *Heils-gut*, the blessing absolute and absolutely a blessing." He insists indeed upon the primacy of this religious category of meaning and value in terms that make its classification as simply one type of value-judgment no longer acceptable. "It is not the *summum bonum*, the highest good," he writes of this *Heils-gut*, "for as such it would be comparable to other values and distinguishable from them only in degree. Rather it is a blessing that by comparison disvalues all other values and makes of them mere means to its acquisition."²⁷

The "new righteousness" of the Kingdom, that is, the *holiness* that characterizes its members, is likewise an expression of a valuation that is definitely other-than-moral. "This is shown most strikingly in the name by which the company of the disciples call themselves collectively and each other individually, the numinous 'technical term' *oi ἄγιοι*, the holy ones or 'the Saints,'" Otto writes. "It is manifest at once that this does not mean 'the morally perfect' people: it means the people who participate in the mystery of the final day."²⁸ Thus in the New Testament as in the thought of Isaiah, holiness has to do with man's worth in the sight of God; it is not concerned primarily with the quality of his moral life.

Otto's conception of the new righteousness of the Kingdom is obviously a reinterpretation of Luther's idea of the "righteousness of faith." As used here, it throws much-needed light upon the relation between the apocalyptic and the ethical aspects in Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom. Holiness, as Otto repeatedly affirms, is a com-

²⁷ *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn*, pp.102-103; cf. the Eng. trans., pp.128-129.

²⁸ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.86.

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plex category containing both ethical and purely religious elements. The *new* righteousness, that is, the holiness, possessed by members of God's Kingdom must include, therefore, both the numinous or transcendent significance emphasized in the eschatology of the gospels and the ethical ideal described in the Sermon on the Mount. The attempt to eliminate either of these aspects of Jesus' teaching actually indicates a failure to comprehend this dual character of the holy.

IV

These three, the sense of sanctity, the consciousness of sin, and the assurance of salvation, Otto distinguishes as autonomous religious categories in which the unique emotional quality of the *numinous* finds mature expression. In these categories there is recognition of meaning and value that is peculiarly and essentially religious. They constitute the independent frame of reference in terms of which any sound interpretation of religion must be made, and quite naturally determine the approach and viewpoint of the influential historical studies that Otto himself continued to carry on during the latter years of his life. This undoubtedly enabled him to recognize clearly the enduring significance and insight of the great non-Christian faiths and at the same time to portray the central genius of Christianity with unusual effectiveness.

From the time of an early visit in India to the day of his death Otto was deeply interested in the manifold historical expressions of Hinduism. No other non-Christian religion impressed him as did the religion of India, and he early set himself the task of laying hold upon its cardinal tenets. There was no aspect of the complex and varied religious thought of India with which he did not

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concern himself, none that he failed to illuminate by his sympathetic insight, and none in which he did not find striking confirmation of his own interpretation of the autonomy of religion.

Both before and after his two best known studies, *Mysticism East and West* and *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, Otto gave himself assiduously to work upon the historical development of religion in India. Over a period of years he carried on an extensive study of the Vedas and in the early Vedic hymns found ample evidence of the determinative place of the *numinous* in religious experience. His mature interpretation of Vedic religion was published in *Aryan Deities and Idea of Deity*.²⁹ This study indicates, upon the basis of abundant historical evidence, that the experience of deity and the idea of God have their origin in man's unique numinous sense of sanctity. In the might and mystery of the natural universe, awesome yet beatific, Otto identifies an autonomous religious meaning and value in which both the multiple deities and the idea of deity in the Vedas are clearly grounded.³⁰

Just as the early expressions of Hinduism require for their interpretation such an autonomous religious judgment, so also its later developments can be understood and compared with Christianity only in terms of unique religious categories of meaning and value. This fact is quite evident in Otto's study of the great Hindu mystic, Shankara; it is even more apparent in his discussion of India's religion of grace, the Bhakti-faith, which had its inspiration in the Bhagavad-Gita. Indeed, the Bhagavad-Gita was one of the classic expressions of the religious con-

²⁹ *Gottheit und Gottheiten der Arier* (Alfred Töpelmann, Giessen, 1932).

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp.1-15, 65-82.

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sciousness which interested Otto in its own right almost as much as did the Christian Scriptures and Luther's sermons. His earlier studies of religion contain innumerable references to the moving theophany in the Gita (Chap. 11), an experience of God strikingly parallel in its divination of numinous sanctity to the great theophany with which the book of Job comes to a close. And during the last years of his life Otto was engaged in a careful analysis of this whole document, the results of which he published in several monographs that were combined and translated into English after his death under the title, *The Original Gita: The Song of the Supreme Exalted One.*³¹

In the Gita Otto discovered that vital expression of Hindu faith, to a fuller examination of which his comparison of *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity* is primarily devoted. Here one finds what is perhaps Otto's most emphatic presentation of the autonomy of religion in terms of the unique religious categories of sin and salvation. No penetrating comparison of Christianity with other religions is possible, he maintains, except in terms of the independent judgment of value by which all genuine religion has been dominated. A comparison based upon theological creed or philosophical speculation is bound to be superficial. If other religions are to be regarded as genuine competitors with Christianity for the allegiance of mankind, "they must be examined not merely for what they have to offer as values in more superficial aspects—in subtle speculation, in profound theories of the structure of the universe, and the like—but in the specifically religious sphere," Otto writes. "And here again they must be

³¹ Allen and Unwin, London, 1939. This volume combined three German monographs: *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gita* (1934), *Die Lehrtraktate der Bhagavad-Gita* (1935), and *Der Sang des Hehr-Erhabenen* (1935).

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considered with regard to that which Christianity has to offer as its deepest and most characteristic element, as its peculiar and central idea—or better, as its peculiar gift, the last and highest good which it has to give humanity. And this is that wondrous good which only the religious man knows, understands, and seeks, viz., redemption and salvation, *sōtēria, salus.*³²

Examination of the Bhakti-faith in India reveals clearly that its primary concern like that of Christianity is to provide a doctrine of “salvation.” Its adherents likewise set as a goal of the religious life a transcendent worth and status that is fundamentally different from ordinary happiness and cannot be described in terms of “natural” values. The most profound ideas and concepts of Hindu soteriology (such as moksha, mukti, rakshanā) can hardly be translated except as redemption and salvation. In such ideas one finds a definitely religious interpretation of human nature and experience, and an autonomous religious consciousness of meaning and value. There is indeed a striking similarity between Protestant Christianity and the Bhakti-religion, not only in their common concern with salvation but also in an insistence in both cases upon salvation which comes not from profound speculation or good works, but through faith alone.³³

Yet there is also an important difference between the two. It is not a difference that can be adequately clarified in terms of theological creed, for the similarity in credal speculation, if one examines carefully the complex fabric of Hindu religious thought, will prove surprising. But there is a difference of inner spirit and attitude to be immediately *felt* by anyone who enters intimately into the

³² *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, p.12.

³³ *ibid.*, pp.13-18.

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spiritual life of the two religions. To account for this Otto suggests that both in its doctrine of salvation and its interpretation of sin, Christianity is the more mature and profound because it includes a developed moral element as well as a distinctly "numinous" meaning and value. This does not mean, of course, that the Bhakti-religion has no moral content. There is a definite and often a high moral ideal in its noblest teaching. But such morality is regarded as sacred, and so a part of the content of religion, simply because of a divine command. It is not as yet recognized on its own account as an essential aspect of the religious consciousness. The same sanctity can attach to anything commanded by the deity, however lacking in moral quality it may be.

"Should one ask the bhakta what was the most fundamental good which he sought, he would answer 'Release and realization of the *ātman* by, and in fellowship with the *parama-ātman* himself,'" Otto writes.

"The axis of the search for salvation in ancient India was as it is given in its old prayer:

Lead me from *non-being* to *being*,
Lead me from darkness to light,
Lead me from death to superdeath.

"But the fundamental motive of the religion of Palestine is given in the ancient word of Holy Writ:

Ye shall be *holy*, for I am *holy*."³⁴

In the unique religious self-disvaluation, basic to the conviction of sin, this fundamental difference in spirit between Christianity and religion in India is even more apparent. It is impossible, Otto points out, to find in Sanscrit a genuine equivalent for the Christian terms, sin

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp.91, 94; cf. Chs. III-IV in general.

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and repentance. *Klēsa*, the word often translated sin, is really an expression designating "the trouble which the chained *ātman* has to suffer in the enchainment of *samsāra*." This term, however, even though it lacks the moral element in the Christian sense of sin, reflects quite clearly a peculiar religious disvaluation of the self. There is indeed in the notion of *samsāra* a distinctly non-moral category of evaluation basic to the whole structure of religious thought in India. While Christianity has devoted itself to saving man from the condemnation of sin and guilt, the religions of India, Otto finds, have been concerned primarily with man's release from the bondage of *samsāra*, that is, "from enchainment to a *worthless* and unworthy form of existence."³⁵

When stating this contrast between Christianity and religion in India, Otto lays such great stress upon the moral element in the Christian idea of sin as almost to contradict the interpretation presented in his essays on *Sin and Original Guilt*. There the definitely secondary character of the moral element in sin is strongly insisted upon. In his comparative study of Hinduism the moral might well seem to be for him the primary element in Christianity. "Christianity is the religion of the conscience *per substantiam*, Bhakti-religion that religion *per accidens*," he writes.³⁶

The purpose of this contrast, however, is to bring into sharp relief the fundamental nature of the difference between the two religious traditions. While the spiritual maturity of Christianity cannot perhaps be logically demonstrated to the Hindu, Otto feels that it can be clearly recognized in the more profound category of meaning and

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp.101-102, 95.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.104; cf. pp.94-108.

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value upon which the Christian consciousness rests. The *axis* of Christianity, as he terms it, is the complex category of the *holy* with its corresponding disvaluation of the self expressed in the ideas of *sin* and *guilt*. Here the necessary moral implication of the religious category is quite apparent. The axis of the Hindu Bhakti-religion, on the other hand, is the less mature ideal of *ātma-siddhi* (release of the self from non-being) in which there is no developed moral content. But both expressions of the religious consciousness, it is important to note, are conditioned by unique and autonomous categories of beatitude and self-disvaluation in terms of which alone their real meaning can be grasped.

Interesting confirmation and development of the foregoing contrast between Christianity and Hinduism is provided in Otto's earlier study, *Mysticism East and West*. Important differences exist, to be sure, between the philosophical mysticism of Shankara with its foundation in the Upanishads and the Bhakti-faith which grew out of the Bhagavad-Gita; and that which is broadly characteristic of less intense religious experience is naturally given more emphatic and exaggerated statement by the mystic. But the mysticism of Shankara reflects as unmistakably as the faith of the Bhakta a unique consciousness of self-disvaluation on the one hand and beatitude on the other, which sets religion apart as autonomous in the life of the human spirit; and the contrast between the Christian and the Hindu experience in the former instance as clearly as in the latter is to be found not in theological creed or in philosophical speculation but in the greater maturity of the Christian apprehension of the holy.

Mystical religion is concerned above all else, as the mystics themselves repeatedly emphasize, with the posses-

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sion of that supreme good which only the consciousness of salvation affords. This is quite as true of such "intellectual mystics" as Meister Eckhart and Shankara as in the more ecstatic or emotional types of mystical experience. Their intellectual speculation has as its single aim the formulation of a doctrine of salvation. "Both men, it is true, are searching for a 'knowledge of being,'" Otto writes, "and it is this question that calls forth their most weighty utterances. But it is a knowledge of Being as salvation-possessing (*heilvollen*) Being." "Neither of them is concerned with 'knowledge' out of curiosity to explain the world, but each is impelled by a longing for 'salvation.'"³⁷

Salvation, as sought and achieved by the mystic, is an experience marked by such transcendent status and worth, moreover, as to be utterly incomprehensible in terms of ordinary or "natural" values. "He who would grasp it aright must estrange himself also from the 'Good' and 'True,'" Eckhart explicitly declares.³⁸ Seeking some interpretation that will suggest more of its nature than does a mere negation of all usual and normal categories, the mystic has been led to describe salvation as union or even identity with God. In Eckhart's words, the human spirit here passes from the level of man, the creature, to the Being and dignity of God himself. For Shankara the *ātman* becomes one with Brahman, indeed *is* Brahman. And as he describes the beatitude which marks this culmination of the mystics' quest, "the cold and abstract thinker Shankara throws aside the mantle of the scholar," Otto points out. "The heart that beats beneath his lifeless formulae throbs audibly and in a flow of living emotion the inner meaning

³⁷ *West-Östliche Mystic*, p.23; cf. the Eng. trans., pp. 16, 17.

³⁸ Quoted by Otto, *op. cit.*, p.22.

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of his whole speculative system breaks forth: a passionate search for salvation—for a good outside this miserable world—a home-sickness—a thirst for eternity.”³⁹

In their treatment of the utter disvaluation of the self in which the sense of sin originates, a similar agreement is to be observed. A unique and independent religious disvaluation of the self is to be seen with equal clarity in Eckhart’s cardinal “doctrine of the creature” and in the Hindu concept of *Māyā*. As creature, man is for Eckhart not simply the creation of God, and therefore good. This is a purely rational interpretation and fails to grasp the unique religious foundation of Eckhart’s doctrine. Man’s creaturehood reveals his vanity and lack of real being, his complete nothingness (*purum nihil*) in himself, Eckhart insists. “All creatures in so far as they are creatures, as they are in themselves, are not even illusion, they are pure nothing.”⁴⁰

Obviously Eckhart is simply attempting here to state conceptually within the framework of his scholastic terminology a unique religious awareness of utter self-disvaluation which he knew immediately in numinous creature-feeling. And the same is true as well of Shankara’s concept of *Māyā*. The illusory character of the human self and the finite world is not for Shankara simply a philosophical concept. His notion of *Māyā* has about it a magical or numinous quality that reflects a peculiarly religious category of disvaluation, a quality that is largely lost in the usual philosophical interpretation of *Māyā*.⁴¹

Thus far Eckhart and Shankara, the West and the East, are agreed. But Eckhart when interpreting the meaning of salvation moves naturally, one might well say neces-

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.191.

⁴⁰ Quoted by Otto, *ibid.*, p.92.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.95, 117.

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sarily, from possession of the being and holiness of God to attainment of the will and purpose of God; from a mysticism of being to a mysticism of will, to use Otto's terms. "The good man enters into all the qualities of goodness itself, which is God," Eckhart writes. "The righteous are like unto God, for God is righteousness. Therefore, whoever is in righteousness is in God and is himself God."⁴² Shankara, on the other hand, fails to recognize this necessary moral element in the religious category. For him the redeemed individual in the identity of *ātman* and Brahman is freed from the burden of all good works and simply "reposes in oneness."

Consistently in his studies of religion in India Otto emphasizes the greater maturity and profoundness of the Christian concepts of holiness, sin and salvation, in which the moral implication of religious experience has become explicit. But as all his major works convincingly reveal, the religious consciousness in general is conditioned by autonomous categories of meaning and value that relate man directly and certainly to a transcendent spiritual reality. The cardinal concepts of the religious life—the sense of sanctity, the conviction of sin, and the assurance of salvation—are intelligible only in terms of a peculiarly religious evaluation of human nature and experience. Whether in Christian or in Hindu theology, in the thought of the mystic or of the prophet, in the primitive or the mature experience, the essence of religion can be comprehended only in such autonomous categories.

In these categories of meaning and value, moreover, the unique emotional quality of the *numinous* finds mature expression. It is obviously not in terms of feeling that Otto interprets the worth and significance of religion, but in

⁴² Quoted by Otto, *op. cit.*, pp.192, 193.

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terms of an independent religious judgment of value clearly identified and carefully portrayed in his historical and theological studies. Indeed, his penetrating psychological analysis of religious experience, and his discerning portrayal of the autonomous value-judgment by which the religious consciousness is conditioned, lay the necessary foundation for a highly original philosophy of religion. But one other essential aspect of Otto's historical and psychological analysis of religion needs to be examined prior to a consideration of his philosophy of religion.

Upon the immediate and vividly-felt apprehension in the religious consciousness of a transcendent objective source of meaning and value Otto places continued emphasis. Many interpreters have taken this to be the most significant aspect of his theology. Unquestionably it is an important one, and one also that has not been too accurately interpreted by most English and American critics. Nor indeed is Otto himself too consistent in analyzing the nature of such independent religious *insight*. His discussion of the problem is genuinely discerning, none the less, and it provides the final aspect of his portrayal of the autonomy of religion as an inescapable fact of experience and history.



C H A P T E R I V

DIVINATION OF DEITY

THE TRANSCENDENT meaning apprehended immediately in religious experience finds clearest expression, of course, in the idea of God. This idea has its source, Otto maintains, in an independent religious *divination* of the Eternal. With Kant he agrees that scientific knowledge is limited in its validity to the phenomenal world of sense experience. But with Schleiermacher and Ritschl he is convinced that religious intuition in some fashion transcends the limits of rational understanding and provides a valid, if necessarily symbolic, apprehension of the ultimate and eternal nature of things.

An accurate comprehension of religious knowledge was, as a matter of fact, the contribution to theology that Otto himself hoped most to make in his *Idea of the Holy*.¹ Actually his historical and psychological interpretation of religious *intuition* rather than his *theory* of religious knowledge is the more significant contribution. He has undoubtedly distinguished with clarity and penetration the empirical forms in which man's consciousness of the Eternal is initially expressed and with remarkable success has uncovered the sources of our enduring religious convictions. As a purely historico-psychological achievement this may well be seen as the completion of his discerning phenome-

¹ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, Foreword, and *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, p.105n.

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nology of religion as well as an introduction to his religious epistemology.

I

Our knowledge of deity, as Otto interprets it, is more akin to aesthetic insight than to rational understanding. In the sense of the *numinous* there is an intuitive and positive awareness of the Eternal which neither scientific understanding nor rational faith can provide. Religious feeling constitutes a form of knowledge independent of and essentially different from that gained by rational understanding. Reason and revelation need to be clearly distinguished. “‘Revelation’ does not mean a *mere* passing over into the intelligible and comprehensible,” Otto writes. “Something may be profoundly and intimately known in feeling for the bliss it brings or the agitation it produces, and yet the understanding may find no concept for it. To *know* and to *understand conceptually* are two different things, are often even mutually exclusive and contrasted.”²

This immediate and intuitive sort of religious insight Otto terms *divination*. “The faculty, of whatever sort it may be, of *genuinely* recognizing and apprehending the Holy in and beyond the realm of phenomena, let us call *divination*,” he writes.³ In such divination he finds an independent religious apprehension of deity—the culmination indeed of that autonomous recognition of transcendent meaning and value expressed immediately in the sense of the *numinous* and meditately in the categories of sanctity, sin and salvation.

² *The Idea of the Holy*, p.189.

³ *Das Heilige*, p.185; cf. the Eng. trans., p.148. Otto’s theory of “divination” is based directly upon the notion of *Ahdnung* developed in the philosophy of Fries. For the Friesian position and Otto’s modification of it, cf. chapter V, below.

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The English translator of *The Idea of the Holy* was especially impressed by Otto's theory of divination. Its importance is emphasized by him not only explicitly in his own preface but implicitly as well in the English terms he chooses to translate Otto's ideas. "Here we are shown," he writes, "that the religious 'feeling' properly involves a unique kind of apprehension, *sui generis*, not to be reduced to ordinary intellectual or rational 'knowing' with its terminology of notions and concepts, and yet—and this is the paradox of the matter—itself a genuine 'knowing,' the growing awareness of . . . deity."⁴

For the initial and in many ways the most striking expression of man's divination of the Eternal Otto quite naturally turns to the realm of art. Long before the dawn of theological theory, religious intuition and feeling provided the inspiration for song and image, for dance and ritual, and then for sacred story and legend. "Primitive" religious conviction is likewise well reflected in early religious art, of which Otto made a fine collection in the *Marburger religionskundliche Sammlung*.⁵ The images by which the gods are portrayed in the Hindu pantheon, for example, afford excellent illustration of divination in its cruder stages. Each of the greater deities represented in Hindu art manifests something of the original numinous *mysterium tremendum*. In the theophany that forms the climax of the Bhagavad-Gita (Ch. 11) the same awesome mystery provides the media through which the presence of deity is initially revealed.

The idea of God in the Old Testament is likewise quite obviously the product of such immediate divination of

⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, Preface, pp.xiv-xv.

⁵ The better examples in this collection have been photographed to provide vivid illustration for most of his studies of religion, but these illustrations are not reproduced in the English translations.

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the Eternal in numinous feeling. Thus a numinous dread and terror is unmistakably reflected in the portrayal of Yahweh in the early passages of the Old Testament, in the prophet Ezekiel's rather weird visions of God, and in the great theophany that brings the book of Job to its close (Chs. 38-41). For Otto, however, the prophet Isaiah's temple-experience (Ch. 6) provides at once the most mature apprehension together with the most effective artistic portrayal of such religious divination of deity. In Isaiah's moving representation of the sovereign might and awesome majesty of God Otto finds divination of the holy in unsurpassable form. Around this passage indeed his analysis of the religious consciousness as a whole seems to revolve; to it he turns again and again to illustrate and verify his own interpretation.⁶

Artistic expressions of divination can hardly be called "knowledge" in the usual sense of that term. They can be said to be true or valid only in the sense that they, like all great art for that matter, reproduce or represent an immediately-felt awareness of meaning and value. Otto, however, insists that in religious feeling, prior to its later conceptual or philosophical interpretation, there is also an immediate intuition that must be recognized as valid (even if non-conceptual) knowledge. In his opinion religious symbolism of the sort described above is an effective means (perhaps the best means) of portraying to others a divination of the Eternal that transcends the realm of conceptual understanding. This representation of deity corresponds "in the domain of 'contemplation' to the part played by argument and persuasion in that of logical conviction." "If one does not immediately apprehend what

⁶ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.52, 63, 79-83, App. II; *Religious Essays*, pp.25-26.

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the numinous is when he reads the sixth chapter of Isaiah, then no ‘preaching, singing, and telling’ will help him,” Otto maintains.⁷

The same general point of view has been suggestively put by Canon Streeter. “The grand error implicit in most apologetic literature,” Streeter writes, “is to treat Religion, and the ‘evidences’ for it, as if it were a branch of science. A religion is true if, and in proportion as, the quality which it expresses is actually existent in, and characteristic of, Reality. It follows that to test the element of truth in any religion we must direct our attention first of all, not to the intellectual constructions of the theologian, but to myth and rite, to hymn and prayer, to parable and proverb, to the mystic’s meditation and the prophet’s trumpet call.”⁸

II

Certainly, however, the religious man has not been content to allow his divination of deity to remain permanently in the form of artistic symbol. This is indicated with sufficient clarity by the vast body of doctrinal theology that has accumulated in every great religious tradition. Moreover, the validity of that theology has been persistently maintained by the deeply religious even when it was contradicted by both scientific hypothesis and philosophical theory. By an emphasis upon the symbolic character of theological doctrine, Otto attempts to safeguard the essential validity of religious faith and at the same time to avoid the pitfalls into which both saint and philosopher have too often fallen. Such an emphasis avoids the dangers of a false literalism in theology and also opens the way for a

⁷ *Das Heilige*, p.88; cf. the Eng. trans., pp.63, 153.

⁸ *Reality* (Macmillan, 1926), p.47.

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more adequate philosophical recognition of the unique insight enshrined in theological symbols.

To distinguish the religious interpretation of reality from the scientific and to indicate something of its symbolic character Otto coins the term *ideogram*, a concept suggested to him by the use of myth in Plato's philosophy. "The most remarkable characteristic of Plato's thought, moreover," Otto writes, "is just that he himself finds science and philosophy too narrow to comprise the whole of man's spiritual life. He has indeed no philosophy of religion as such; but he apprehends that which is religious by wholly other instruments than those of conceptual thought, namely by mythological ideograms, through exaltation, love and the divine frenzy."⁹ An *ideogram* is thus in general like the myth for Plato. It is "a sort of illustrative substitute for a concept," "a figurative designation of something essentially non-rational." In contrast to the artistic symbols already described it is a kind of conceptual symbol, that is, a concept drawn from ordinary sense-experience and rational thought to represent and suggest the transcendent meaning of numinous feeling of which no exact conceptual interpretation is possible.¹⁰

Two types of *conceptual symbol* or *ideogram* are identified by Otto, single concepts that interpret symbolically one moment of numinous feeling, and theological doctrines in which a more comprehensive conceptual statement of man's divination of deity is attempted. His familiar designation of the religious object as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is simply a description of deity in terms of the unique emotional complex that he identifies in the *numi-*

⁹ *Das Heilige*, p.126; cf. the Eng. trans., p.98.

¹⁰ cf. Otto's passing references, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.19, 24, 26, 34, 35, 61, 79, etc.

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nous. Here the holy is only known immediately in feeling. But ideograms are soon employed to express symbolically the intuitive divination contained in this unique emotional complex and, as Otto's analysis convincingly shows, these ideograms become an essential aspect of man's idea of God.

Among the most striking symbols of this sort are the ideograms in which the numinous *tremendum* and *fascinans* have found clearest statement: respectively, the "wrath" and the "grace" of God. The idea of power alone, even absolute power, is inadequate to describe that which is immediately felt in numinous dread or awe as *tremendum*. In the minds of those who vividly apprehend its presence in the awesome sanctity of the natural universe, *tremendum* is power incalculable, arbitrary, overwhelming and terrifying, akin to uncontrollable human wrath. This quality of deity is strongly emphasized in the primitive pantheon of India.¹¹ The "wrath of Yahweh" likewise stands out as an important aspect of the deity in Old Testament religion. And even in the New Testament the divine ὁργή is clearly to be seen. "This wrath is nothing but the 'tremendum' itself," Otto writes, "in itself entirely non-rational, but here apprehended and expressed by the aid of a naïve analogy from the domain of natural experience, in this case from man's ordinary passionnal life. Yet the analogy is most disconcertingly apt and striking; so much so that it will always retain its value and be for us also an inevitable way of expressing the religious feeling."¹²

Emerging from the opposite pole of numinous feeling, its blissful exaltation, Otto distinguishes an equally independent and significant divination of deity, expressed in ideogram as the "grace of God." This divination holds a

¹¹ cf. *Gottheit und Gottheiten der Arier*, pp.1-15.

¹² *Das Heilige*, p.22; cf. the Eng. trans., p.19.

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central place in both Christian and Bhakti theology and is accepted by Otto as the primary insight of mysticism as well.¹³ It is an essential aspect indeed of every vital experience of salvation. Yet attempts to interpret the grace of God entirely in rational or moral terms have failed as signally as the comparable effort to reinterpret the divine wrath. The symbolic character of any conceptual notion of the "grace of God," i.e. the fact that it is essentially an ideogram, persistently manifests itself in the transcendent, non-rationalizable quality of deity designated therein. In his "grace" God bestows upon the regenerate a blessing that a man knows he has not earned, and in his wrath God inflicts a penalty upon the unsaved that he is certain his conduct does not justify. "Just as 'wrath,' taken in a purely rational or ethical sense, does not exhaust the profound element of *awefulness* which is locked in the mystery of deity, so neither does 'graciousness' exhaust the profound element of *wonderfulness* and rapture which lies in the mysterious beatific experience of deity."¹⁴

The wrath of God and the grace of God are then simply *ideograms*, analogies that are not to be mistaken for knowledge of a scientific or conceptual sort. But, despite their symbolic character, they clearly reveal a transcendent implication of numinous sanctity that can never be completely resolved into such rational and moral concepts as the just punishment or reward of human conduct. As such each expresses for Otto "an element of 'holiness' itself, and a quite indispensable one."

The most striking ideogram of this sort, however, employed to indicate the antithesis of the holy to the natural order, and to emphasize the non-conceptual character of

¹³ cf. *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity*, pp.17, 86, 122; and *Mysticism East and West*, pp.200-207.

¹⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.32.

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religious divination, is that of God as *the wholly-other*. This suggests, as no less emphatic phrase could, the absolute transcendence of the holy, vividly apprehended in numinous awe and amazement. God as *the wholly-other* is a religious ideogram to which Otto devotes careful attention, partly because he finds it to be so fundamental to man's divination of deity, partly because it so directly confirms his insistence that the holy completely transcends the rational understanding, and partly because of the difficulty that such a phrase inevitably causes the interpreter.

As Otto is careful to point out, this is not an ideogram that he himself invented. It is rather a conviction that has characterized all man's most profound awareness of God. Centuries before the Christian era it was the phrase used in the Upanishads to express the deepest insights of philosophical Hinduism concerning the nature of the deity. (The Sanscrit phrase in *Anyad Eva*.) Augustine incorporates it as a basic aspect in Christian theology, finding that he can describe the God of his deepest experience only as *aliud valde* (wholly-other) than all earthly splendor and greatness. Even in the scholastic interpretation of God as ultimate being and in the *simplicitas Dei* of scholastic speculation, Otto sees a reflection of the same divination. "We put it concisely thus," he writes: "The formula that God is the being itself of things, or is 'being in general,' endeavors somehow to realize the quite incomprehensible, transcendent relationship of God to the world, and to contrast it as something 'wholly other' than all ordinary rational categories of relationship, such as time and space, number and measure, and finally cause."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ *Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen*, p.220. Cf. *Religious Essays*, p.85, and Essay IX in general: "The 'Wholly Other' in Religious History and Theology."

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The mystic, more concerned than the scholastic philosopher to give uncompromising expression to this essentially religious insight, not only contrasts the deity with all that is natural and human but contrasts it with being itself, even describing God as "that which is nothing" to make plain his intention. "By this 'nothing' is meant not only that of which nothing can be predicted," Otto points out, "but that which is absolutely and intrinsically other than and opposite of everything that is and can be thought."¹⁶ The antithesis between such a transcendent sanctity and the realm comprehended by human reason is indeed felt by the mystic to be so fundamental that for him the idea of God as the *wholly-other* expresses not simply the non-rational or supra-rational character of deity but contains a definitely *irrational* implication as well. In a section of *Das Heilige* not included in the English translation Otto accordingly uses the term *Irrsinn* rather than the customary *Irrational* to express the character of paradox and antinomy in God as the wholly-other, which he finds in Job and Luther quite as definitely as in the mysticism of Eckhart.¹⁷ The similar emphasis upon the otherness of God in the Barthian theology today indicates that there is less difference at this point between mystical and more normal religious experience than is often suggested.

A final aspect of Otto's interpretation of "the wholly-other" reveals clearly the significance of this term itself and likewise the nature of ideogram in general. The numinous "wholly-other" is felt as not only beyond the grasp of reason and conceptual understanding, but as that "whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own," Otto writes; "something which not merely overtops our every concept, but astounds us by its absolute and

¹⁶ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.30. ¹⁷ *Das Heilige*, pp.38-39.

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utter difference from our whole nature.”¹⁸ If this comment were literally true, of course, and if the deity as “holy” were absolutely other than and completely incommensurable with the human spirit as well as with the rational understanding, then it would be impossible to apprehend its nature by any means whatever, even by an intuitive divination. It is into some such dilemma as this that the Barthian theologians have fallen. Acutely conscious in their own religious experience of the “otherness” of God, they mistakenly accept this divination as a valid conceptual statement. Quite logically then they deny the possibility of a path from man to God, but fail to recognize that this makes religion itself impossible. To describe God as *wholly-other* is actually to use a conceptual symbol or ideogram, to employ an analogy, from which no such logical inference as this can legitimately be drawn.

The mystic indeed is as certain of his own *apprehension* of the character of the deity that stands opposed to him as “wholly-other” as he is of its *incomprehensibility*. As a matter of fact, the innermost depth of his own being, that which religion has termed the soul, is likewise experienced by him as marvel and mystery, a numinous reality itself “wholly-other” than the physical and material world through which it operates. Thus Eckhart insists: “God is inexpressible and he has no name. At bottom the soul is also inexpressible as He is.” Or, as the author of the Bhagavad-Gita writes: “He speaketh of the ‘wholly-other,’ who speaketh of the *Atman*.” In the same spirit Otto concludes: “In us too all that we call person and personal, indeed all that we can know or name in ourselves at all, is but one element in the whole. Beneath it lies, even in us, that ‘wholly-other,’ whose profundities, impenetrable

¹⁸ *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.28, 185.

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to any concept, can yet be grasped in the numinous self-feeling by one who has experience of the deeper life.”¹⁹

Only in such symbolic fashion and by analogies of this sort can immediate divination of the holy in numinous feeling find expression. If taken literally, ideograms like the wrath of God and even the grace of God degenerate into a crude anthropomorphism. For religious epistemology it is disastrous to mistake these “symbolic expressions of feeling for adequate concepts upon which a ‘scientific’ structure of knowledge may be based.” This simply brings confusion into rational theology and produces the pseudoscience of theosophy. “For the characteristic mark of all theosophy is just this,” Otto writes: “having confounded analogical and figurative ways of expressing feeling with rational concepts, it then systematizes them, and out of them spins, like a monstrous web, a ‘science of God’ . . .”²⁰

But it is equally fatal in Otto’s opinion to explain away all such ideograms as simply the inadequate attempts of a less intelligent age to interpret its experience, and then to substitute in their place a purely naturalistic interpretation of reality drawn from contemporary science. This is again to make the mistake of thinking that the Eternal and Ultimate can be completely comprehended in rational concept. The autonomous category of meaning and value by which the religious divination of deity is conditioned is thus lost sight of, and its independent apprehension of the Transcendent and Eternal disregarded.

Reinhold Niebuhr, agreeing with Otto that it is the function of *ideogram* or *myth* to embody the awareness in religious experience of a transcendent meaning and value,

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.208; cf. in general App. IV: “‘Spirit’ and ‘soul’ as Numinous Entities.”

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.111.

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has stated this general position with characteristic insight. "Traditional religion uses myths to point to an unconditioned good beyond, behind and above all conditioned and relative values of human existence," Niebuhr writes. "It is the genius of true myth to suggest the dimension of depth in reality, and to point to a realm of essence which transcends the surface of history, on which the cause-effect sequences, discovered and analyzed by science, occur." "But since myth cannot speak of the trans-historical without using symbols and events in history as its forms of expression, it invariably falsifies the facts of history, as seen by science, to state its truths."²¹

III

Not only simple ideograms of the sort just described but also more developed theological doctrines have their source in man's immediate and vividly felt divination of deity. The Christian doctrine of predestination on the one hand, and the doctrine of the atonement on the other, provide maturer statement of the intuitive insight expressed initially as simple ideograms in the wrath and the grace of God. The symbolic nature of both these doctrines is clearly apparent. Neither of them can be made thoroughly rational or logically consistent, and must inevitably offer a stumbling-block to those who insist that only a rational interpretation of religious faith is valid.

Otto's interpretation of predestination affords excellent illustration of his general theory of the nature of theology. No effort to rationalize the doctrine of predestination can reveal its true meaning, he maintains. To interpret this doctrine in terms of a universal scientific determinism

²¹ cf. Niebuhr's essay in *Christendom*, Winter, 1938, p.2; and *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, pp.12, 13.

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simply discards the independent religious divination central in the idea of predestination, thereby reducing it to the level of scientific theory and destroying its deeper spiritual significance. "It is perhaps precisely the 'rationalist,'" Otto writes, "who feels most directly that with the idea of predestination we are standing on downright non-rational ground. Nothing remains so alien to the rationalist as this doctrine. And from his point of view he is quite right; from the standpoint of the rational this notion of predestination is sheer absurdity, an absolute offense. Let him acquiesce in all the paradoxes of the Trinity and Christology, predestination will yet remain perpetually to confront him as a stumbling block."²²

Only in immediate religious feeling and not by means of rational analysis or scientific theory can the meaning of predestination be understood. The origin of that doctrine is clearly to be seen in the religious consciousness of creaturehood, in man's vivid awareness of his own impotence and dependence in the presence of that which overwhelms and overpowers him, completely controlling his being and his destiny. "For the notion of predestination, as religiously felt," Otto points out, "is nothing but the self-expression of that 'creature-feeling,' that abasement and annulment of personal strength, claim and achievement in the presence of the transcendent as such. The numen, overpoweringly experienced, becomes all in all. The acts, the 'willing and running,' the schemes and resolves, the very being of the creature becomes nothing. The conceptual expression to indicate such a felt submergence and annihilation over against the numen is then the acknowledgement of impotence here and omnipotence there, of the

²² *The Idea of the Holy*, p.90.

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futility of one's own choice here and the ordaining and determining of all there.”²³

Examination of the religious experience of those who have laid greatest emphasis upon predestination substantiates the validity of this contention. The empirical basis of St. Paul's doctrine is quite apparent in such passages as Romans ix. 13-21, with its characteristic expression of creature-feeling. And, as Otto himself points out, “it was inevitable that the doctrine of predestination would in due course make its appearance in Luther, and in his case we do not need, as we did in the case of Paul, to *postulate* the close inner connection between this doctrine and the numinous temper, for in the *De Servo Arbitrio* it is palpably evident.”²⁴ If, moreover, the idea of predestination springs directly from an immediate divination of deity in creature-feeling, it is not surprising that religion in which there has been little rationalization of religious faith should over-emphasize this doctrine at the expense of the more rational and moral aspects of the deity. The predestinarianism of Islam, for example, reflects directly the numinous, indeed the uncanny and almost demonic, character of Allah.

“In the above statement concerning the notion of predestination there is also an evaluation of it,” Otto writes. “It is an attempt to express in conceptual terms that which is at bottom incapable of explication by concepts. As an analogical expression with its mystery unresolved it is entirely justified and has its own rightful place. But it immediately becomes ‘summa injuria’ if its character as analogy is missed, and instead of an ideogram it is accepted

²³ *Das Heilige*, pp.117-118; cf. the Eng. trans., p.92.

²⁴ *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.105-106.

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as a genuine concept and made the basis of a rational theory.”²⁵

This interpretation of the doctrine of predestination as essentially a developed ideogram likewise makes clear the fundamental distinction between it and a fatalistic philosophy. From the religious idea of predestination, no logical inferences nor rational systems can be derived. The significance of this is excellently illustrated when effort is made to relate predestination to the problem of human freedom. A completely logical and consistent theological system must sacrifice either the divine sovereignty or human freedom. Yet both are fundamental convictions of man's spiritual life. Both can be retained, however, only if, as Otto maintains, the supra-logical symbolic character of theological doctrine is recognized. Thus the great error of Calvinistic theology lies not in what it affirms; its affirmation of the sovereignty of God is an inescapable religious intuition. Its error lies rather in what it apparently denies in the effort to derive a strictly logical theological system from this independent and purely religious insight.

In Otto's opinion each religious divination “stands alone and is only warrant for itself.” The doctrine of election, for example, is “true” not as a logical implication of predestination but only as an immediate apprehension in the experience of salvation that quite apart from man's own will or power “grace was imparted to him, grasped him, impelled him, led him.” From this ideogram, moreover, no inferences can legitimately be drawn concerning the eternal damnation of others.²⁶

²⁵ *Das Heilige*, p.121; cf. the Eng. trans., pp.92-94.

²⁶ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, p.91. This general position Otto accepts directly from Schleiermacher. “Every such religious intuition is an independent act without relation to or dependence upon others; it knows nothing of derivation and connection.” (*Reden*, p.37, Otto's edition.)

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What is true of predestination is true also of Christian theology in general. In the doctrine of the atonement Otto finds symbolic expression of a divination that is at once the most profound and most paradoxical of Christian intuitions. How finite human nature can in any manner attain a oneness with the Transcendent and Holy is a mystery beyond our power to comprehend. Yet, in the unique exaltation and bliss that distinguishes the Christian consciousness of salvation, there is immediate divination that such is the case. Man, the creature, through his faith in Christ is redeemed, rescued from his natural profanity and lostness, and in unbelievable fashion enabled to participate in the transcendent being and worth of the Holy itself.

Here again the effort to interpret a religious divination in completely rational or moral terms misses what is essential and unique in the theological doctrine. The Christian Church has wisely refused to place its official approval upon any legalistic interpretation of the atonement, no matter how ingeniously it outlines the responsibilities of God as a divine judge or describes the imputation of the merit of Christ to sinners. It has been equally cautious with regard to all moral influence theories, no matter how convincingly they portray the creative moral dynamic of the Cross. The doctrine of the atonement is an effort to pierce the ultimate mystery that envelops the relation of God and the human spirit; in Otto's terms it is an attempt to describe the manner in which "the abyss between creature and Creator, 'profanum' and 'sanctum,' sin and holiness," has been marvellously bridged.²⁷ Hence the character of this doctrine as ideogram, as a faltering search for

²⁷ *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.58-60, 175.

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the least inadequate analogy that human experience can provide in portraying man's commerce with the Eternal and Transcendent, stands out in clear contrast to all speculative formulations of its meaning.

The doctrine of atonement gives expression to the most profound Christian intuition concerning the person and work of Christ. What has been said of it applies likewise to the other theological doctrines in which our immediate divination of the holy in Christ is interpreted. The doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity are obviously analogies to illumine an irresolvable mystery, but a mystery whose deeper meaning has been glimpsed at least in religious divination. This recognition that Jesus is more than "the supreme divining *subject*," is indeed "the *object* of divination *par excellence*" and himself Holiness incarnate, constitutes for Otto the culmination of man's divination of deity, and likewise the essential distinction between his own Christology and that of Schleiermacher.²⁸

IV

The sense of the *numinous* Otto thus convincingly identifies as the source from which the persistent intuitions of historical religion spring. With remarkable thoroughness and precision he has portrayed man's awareness of the Transcendent and Eternal as reflected in religious feeling and expressed in religious ideogram. The problem of validating the symbols or ideograms used to express this religious divination, however, and of relating religious conviction to the scientific interpretation of the universe is certainly a perplexing one. No one perhaps has stated the difficulty more pointedly than Reinhold Niebuhr. "The approach to the transcendent source of meaning confronts

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.159, 176-178, 182.

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us with a problem which seems practically insolvable," Niebuhr writes. "If the meaningfulness of life points to a source beyond itself, how is it possible to say anything about this transcendence, and how can anything that can be said be verified as true?" "It is possible only if it be realized that though human knowledge and experience always point to a source of meaning in life which transcends knowledge and experience, there are nevertheless suggestions of the character of this transcendence in experience."²⁹

In his later studies of religion Otto presents his own religious epistemology largely as a development of the position suggested in Schleiermacher's *Addresses on Religion*. Schleiermacher maintains that the human spirit, when absorbed in contemplation of the vast, living totality of things in nature and history, is capable of discerning intuitively the Eternal and Infinite in that which is finite and transient. In Otto's opinion, moreover, "though these intuitions are limited and inadequate they are none the less indisputably true, i.e. true as far as they go; and for all Schleiermacher's aversion to the word in this connection they must be termed *cognitions*, modes of *knowing*, though, of course, not the product of reflection, but the intuitive outcome of feeling. Their import is the glimpse of an Eternal, in and beyond the temporal and penetrating it, the apprehension of a ground and meaning of things in and beyond the empirical and transcending it."³⁰

Psychology, in so far as it identifies "feeling" with emotion and thus distinguishes it completely from knowledge,

²⁹ cf. Niebuhr's essay in *The Nature of Religious Experience* (Harpers, 1938), pp.181, 183.

³⁰ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.151.

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obscures the deeper meaning of the term, a meaning that it originally had and, Otto insists, still possesses in ordinary usage. Emotions like love, hate, fear or gratitude, for example, clearly presuppose some immediately-apprehended knowledge of an external reality, and are themselves unquestionably secondary or derivative from this apprehension. "Feeling" on the other hand actually involves the primary apprehension as well as the secondary emotional response, and cannot validly be identified merely with the latter. We customarily distinguish a man "of sure feeling" from one "of clear understanding," and the former under certain circumstances may well have an insight that is "much clearer, quicker, more penetrating and capable of sounder judgment" than the latter, who may lack an "intuitive, enlightening, discriminating, 'instinctively certain' feeling," and as a consequence be "the less discerning in spite of his greater intellectual readiness in logical diremption, deduction and proof."⁸¹

Feeling as immediate apprehension is especially characteristic of the poet and artist. As exemplified in Goethe, it affords insight into fundamental purposes and meanings, into that which is deeper, more obscure and personal than the objects of conceptual reasoning. Such feeling also provides the element of immediate certainty which knowledge must possess before it can become a sure guide to life. "Feeling in this sense," Otto writes, "is definitely equivalent to knowledge in pre-conceptual form." "And *intuitus*, intuition, intuitive apprehension, are common synonyms for apprehension and certainty in feeling." " 'Feeling' in its most complete sense one could perhaps define as 'in-

⁸¹ *Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen*, p.328. (From an untranslated note on the meaning of feeling to Schleiermacher.)

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tuitive, pre-conceptual apprehension, *permeated, moreover, with most powerful valuations.*³²"³²

In mystic intuition as described by Eckhart, Otto finds an explicit defense of just such immediate, non-conceptual apprehension of God. Eckhart particularly emphasizes the inadequacy and limitation of all ordinary, conceptual or "scientific" knowledge, condemning this indeed as a means of hiding the true knowledge of God from us. "No common logical or scientific consideration, no conclusions drawn, no proofs offered, in short, no power of the ordinary understanding" can in his opinion provide knowledge of the divine nature. Above all *ratio*, all logical "reasoning" or discursive, conceptual understanding, Eckhart distinguishes a specific faculty for knowledge of the transcendent which he terms the *intellectus*. When in man's deepest spiritual experience (that of rebirth or salvation) "God himself is born in the depths of the soul," the human intellect is itself "informed" by the eternal Word of God. Only thus does immediate, intuitive apprehension of the deity become possible, Eckhart maintains. In the language of the mystic: "To have the Word in one's self is to have part of God's own knowledge and in the very knowledge of God, by which God knows himself."³³

The theory of religious knowledge suggested here is, as a matter of fact, more in accord with the thought of Luther and Ritschl than with Schleiermacher's position. Divination of deity, as Otto describes it, is directly conditioned by an immediate intuitive awareness of religious value; it is not simply a matter of feeling. Only he who is conscious, however obscurely, of his own sin and "unworthi-

³² *West-Östliche Mystik*, pp.384, 385. (Italics mine. From an untranslated note on the meaning of feeling to Goethe.)

³³ *Mysticism East and West*, pp.32, 197.

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ness" in the religious sense can understand the "wrath of God." Only the "sanctified," those who have entered into the new righteousness of God's kingdom (the righteousness of faith), can comprehend the "grace of God." In his study of mysticism, Otto himself emphasizes the fact that mystic intuition is thus conditioned by a prior religious awareness of meaning and value. Eckhart's metaphysical theory must be recognized, he points out, as actually a "doctrine of salvation." Cosmological speculation, when disassociated from the mystic's consciousness of the incomparable worth of knowledge of God, has neither interest nor meaning for Eckhart, who insists indeed that the soul must participate in the very holiness of God himself in order to attain the higher religious knowledge of deity.³⁴

In his able study of *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* William E. Hocking provides a discerning analysis of the relation of feeling to knowledge which not only confirms Otto's insistence upon the cognitive significance of feeling but also emphasizes the essential awareness of value by which such intuitive knowledge is conditioned. "All positive feeling, I dare now say, reaches its terminus in *knowledge*," Professor Hocking writes. "And thus knowledge, which of old has had the dreary character of feeling-quencher, must also be accepted as feeling-goal, the natural absorbent and destiny of feeling. All positive feeling is at heart some marriage quest which ends in knowledge. And such knowledge, so far from being less a 'value-consciousness' than the feeling which has led up to it, is but the more excellent condition of that very value-consciousness embodied in the feeling."³⁵

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp.16-19, 193, 206.

³⁵ *op. cit.* (Yale Univ. Press, 1912), pp.67-68.

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In religion as Otto portrays it, the sense of the *numinous* is the initial and concrete expression in feeling of an autonomous religious category of meaning and value. There is no awareness of God as external objective reality that is independent of this consciousness of religious value. The cognitive significance of the *numinous* depends ultimately upon the metaphysical significance of the category of the holy. Only in so far as this autonomous religious category of meaning and value is recognized as a form by which a transcendent reality is known, can the transcendent quality of the Holy, as immediately apprehended in numinous feeling and symbolically stated in ideogram, be legitimately accepted as knowledge.

It is this conclusion unquestionably to which the logic of Otto's position points. His attempt to substantiate his own theory of divination by an appeal to Schleiermacher's idea of religious feeling, while refusing to recognize his large debt to the theology of Ritschl, simply confuses and weakens his religious epistemology. For this leads him to speak of numinous feeling as itself an independent type of knowledge, even to defend the cognitive significance of such feeling, without making it clear that knowledge of God derives ultimately from an autonomous religious category of meaning and value (the holy). As a matter of fact, Otto's original and enduring contribution to the theory of religious knowledge in *The Idea of the Holy* is to be found just at this point. Fortunately in what he has to say about the religious *A priori* the true character of man's divination of deity is more explicitly recognized.

Not only Otto's theory of the religious *A priori* but also his notion of divination is largely influenced by the philosophy of Fries, an early disciple of Kant. Although in his own mature concept of religion Otto rather significantly

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modifies the position of Fries, he never completely abandons it. His ultimate dependence upon the Friesian idealism becomes quite clear indeed as one seeks to determine the metaphysical foundation upon which his theory of the religious *A priori* rests. Before turning to a more direct examination of Otto's philosophy of religion, consideration must be given, therefore, to the thought of Fries.



C H A P T E R V

THE FRIESIAN IDEALISM

IN ITS TOTAL implications a philosophy of religion cannot be limited to the domain of knowledge and value but must also establish a place for itself in the realm of metaphysics. Otto himself unfortunately does little more than indicate the general character of the metaphysics to which his *Idea of the Holy* points. Upon almost every crucial issue of this sort he is content to turn to the philosophy of Fries for suggestion, finding in the Friesian idealism the ultimate justification as well as the initial inspiration of his own position, and never attempting any systematic statement of philosophy other than that sketched in his early *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie* (1909).

During his years on the Göttingen faculty, when concerned to vindicate the independent worth and significance of religion before the rising prestige of natural science, Otto was strongly attracted by the thought of Fries. "We share the opinion and conviction gradually gaining ground in philosophical circles," he wrote at that time, "that in the sphere of the science of religion, after all our historical theory, our many comparisons, inductions, individual improvisations and clever hypotheses, we must go back to that massive and systematic investigation of the rational foundation of religion in the human spirit which German idealism, continuing the preparatory work of the *Aufklärung*,

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undertook in varied fashion. But we are firmly persuaded that, of all its representatives and tendencies, Fries and the Friesian position are in method most successful and in result most trustworthy, and on this account are of importance as a foundation and point of departure for our own inquiry.”¹

In his *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie* Otto accordingly restates the Friesian idealism with all the fervor of a disciple. His major concern in so doing, even at that time, was simply to provide a sound philosophical foundation for his own theological inquiry. Neither here nor in his later studies is there sustained interest in the metaphysical issues raised by his interpretation of religion, nor does he anywhere adequately recognize the modification of the Friesian position involved in his mature doctrine of religious autonomy. Despite the almost complete contradiction between his own later theory and the Friesian theory of the *Apriori* he never surrendered his early allegiance to the idealism of Fries.² Careful examination of the philosophy of Fries reveals not only Otto's permanent indebtedness to the Friesian interpretation of religion but also his significant modification of its major tenet. This creates a serious metaphysical dilemma in his own philosophy of religion which Otto is never able completely to resolve.

I

Jakob Friedrich Fries, an early nineteenth century disciple of Kant, undertook to develop the Kantian critical philosophy along more definitely idealistic lines. With

¹ *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie*, p.2; cf. the Eng. trans. (*The Philosophy of Religion*), pp.15-16.

² While lecturing in this country in 1923, Otto explicitly reaffirmed this fact in private conversation.

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Kant, Fries regarded a searching critique of human reason as the initial and primary task of philosophy. By this approach alone could the contribution of the mind itself to our interpretation of experience be determined, he felt, and the basis laid for valid distinction between the true and the false, the eternal and the finite. The problem of knowledge or, as Fries prefers to term it, the nature of truth, thus becomes the fundamental concern of the Friesian as of the Kantian philosophy. A much more important role, however, is assigned to religious experience in the epistemology of Fries than in the Kantian *Critiques*. Indeed Fries' theory of religion is an integral aspect of his philosophical system as a whole, to which a stimulating and popular introduction is provided in his best known work, *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung* (1805).

Developing the viewpoint suggested in Kant's three *Critiques*, Fries proposes a three-fold division of human understanding: scientific knowledge (*Wissen*), rational faith (*Glaube*) and religio-aesthetic intuition and feeling (*Ahndung*) are distinguished by him as independent but mutually complementary forms of knowledge. The unique feeling in which such religio-aesthetic insight finds initial expression, Fries identifies, moreover, as the heart of genuine piety and true religion. "The spiritual mood that makes one religious is then primarily and clearly a particular mood of feeling," he writes; "its essence consists neither in conduct nor in knowledge, but in feeling and . . . this religious feeling is that which I term the *Ahndung* of the Eternal in the finite."³

In the identification of piety with feeling Fries is clearly influenced by Schleiermacher's *Addresses on Religion*, published but a few years before his own *Wissen, Glaube*

³ *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung* (Jena, 1805), p.289.

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und Ahndung. His primary concern, however, is not to establish with Schleiermacher the independence of religion from morality and metaphysics, but rather to clarify the underlying relation of religion as feeling to aesthetic judgment, to moral conduct and to knowledge of the real world. Emphasis is placed by him, therefore, upon the moral dynamic and the unique insight involved in all vital religious feeling. High religion consists not simply of pious feeling but of moral idealism, strong devotion to duty, and rational faith in God as well. "No consciousness of moral obligation exists without the faith and immediately-felt insight of religion," Fries writes, "and this in turn derives its whole life and meaning only from that consciousness."⁴

Nevertheless feeling remains for him as for Schleiermacher the essence of genuine religion, his own analysis of religious feeling making an important contribution to the inquiry undertaken by Schleiermacher. An immediate awareness of the Eternal in the majesty and beauty of our natural environment is distinguished by Fries as the primary source of religious feeling, and the mood thus aroused he terms *devotion*. But a similar consciousness of the Eternal is likewise found in the sublimity of high spiritual attainment, manifesting itself there unmistakably in a unique feeling of *exaltation*.⁵ His mature idea of

⁴ *ibid.*, p.248.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.233. The English word "enthusiasm" does not adequately suggest the feeling designated by the Friesian terms *Begeisterung* and *Enthusiasmus*, although employed for that purpose in the English translation of Otto's *Kantisch-Friesische Religionsphilosophie*. "Exaltation" conveys much more exactly the nature of this feeling, which Otto himself describes as a "spiritual elevation, comparable with no other feeling, beatific rather than happy, . . . which can reach the point of intoxication." (*Philosophy of Religion*, pp.137-138.) The use of exaltation also indicates the similarity of the Friesian analysis to Otto's own later designation of this aspect of religious feeling as *Hochgefühl*.

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religion in its entirety is concisely but clearly stated by Fries as follows: "First and most essential is that mood in which piety consists: the feeling of exaltation, of surrender to God and devotion. Therein there lives for everyone a religion of the heart that is the very core of our moral life. Of service also to this moral-religious feeling are the highest ideas in the human reason of what is eternally true: its faith in divine providence, in the eternal destiny of man, and in an eternal cleansing and sanctifying of his will. This constitutes the second aspect of the religious life—the doctrines of faith. In the third place, the truths of faith spring from the depths of the human spirit and no sense-experience nor perception can provide us with proof thereof."⁶

The essential contribution of religion to morality and to truth is apparent not merely in Fries' interpretation of religion, but even more clearly in his theory of *Ahndung*. His defense in this theory of the independent validity of religious insight is the outgrowth and culmination of his theory of knowledge in general, however, and can only be understood in that larger context.

In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* Fries sees the only possible foundation of a sound epistemology. Kant's statement of our inability to account in terms of experience alone for the necessity and universality that characterizes all dependable knowledge, and his postulation of *a priori* categories of interpretation inherent in the structure of the mind itself as the source of such knowledge, Fries finds completely convincing. In his own opinion, moreover, the *a priori* categories of the understanding express an imme-

⁶ *Julius und Evangoras*, pp.269-270 (quoted by J. Hasenfuss, *Die Religionsphilosophie bei Jakob Friedrich Fries*, Würzburg, 1935, pp.41-42).

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diate knowledge possessed by the reason itself. This knowledge comes to light only in the interpretation of concrete sense experience, to be sure, but as Kant clearly demonstrates, it cannot be derived from such experience. According to Fries, however, Kant much too readily surrenders the objective validity of this *a priori* knowledge of pure reason. For Kant's chief interest, he feels, is really moral rather than intellectual, the *Critique of Pure Reason* being actually designed to make way for the moral faith of the *Critique of Practical Reason* rather than to provide an unprejudiced epistemological investigation.⁷ At this point accordingly Fries himself proposes to carry forward the initial undertaking of Kant.

The epistemological dualism and agnosticism of the Kantian philosophy rests upon the assumption that the *a priori* categories of reason do not provide valid knowledge of objective reality, but are applicable only to the phenomenal world of human experience. There is no ground, Fries maintains, for thus renouncing our confidence in reason. Indeed it is not even possible to do so consistently. By a clearer elucidation of the nature of truth and knowledge he is convinced that the Kantian epistemological dilemma itself can be resolved.

Truth, as customarily defined, is the agreement of an idea with its object. Such truth is expressed in rational judgments that appear capable of logical proof, and only when thus proved are accepted as valid knowledge. More accurate analysis reveals, Fries points out, that this "proof" is not as ultimate as at first appears. For all such logical validation presupposes a previous knowledge on which the supposed proof itself depends. In order to establish any valid truth at all, therefore, an original knowl-

⁷ cf. *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*, pp.19, 42.

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edge must be posited as a possession of the human reason itself—a knowledge more ultimate than the mediate knowledge of logical reflection, incapable itself of further “proof,” and in some fashion self-authenticating. It is such knowledge as this that finds partial expression at least in Kant’s *a priori* categories of rational understanding.

The “truth” that is expressed in rational concept and validated by logical reflection, cannot then be defined as the agreement of concept with an objective reality, there being obviously no means of getting outside our world of ideas to determine such agreement. Truth of this sort consists rather in the agreement of the rational concept with that immediate and original knowledge of the human mind upon which all logical reasoning depends. “We cannot say, therefore, of truth as contrasted with error (as is customarily done) that truth is the agreement of idea with its object,” Fries writes, “but only that the truth of a judgment is the agreement of the same with the immediate knowledge of reason.”⁸

In contrast to this “empirical truth,” Fries recognizes a higher “transcendental truth” found in the immediate, *a priori* knowledge of human reason. Of the objective validity of such knowledge no ordinary “proof” can be given, of course, for it is the source from which the validity of all logical proof itself derives. But the immediate knowledge of reason comes to the mind provided with its own criterion of validity, a deep and inescapable “feeling of truth” (*Wahrheitsgefühl*), which the human reason accepts without question. Thus for Fries “objective validity is not something that we first mediately in the history of

⁸ *ibid.*, p.29; cf. also pp.19-32.

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our ideas add to them, but it lies immediately in every act of knowing.”⁹

A clearer understanding of the nature of error is also involved in this interpretation of truth, Fries feels. Error applies only to a realm of logical reflection and mediate, conceptual knowledge. In such rational process a mistake or invalid conclusion is both possible and frequent. The possibility of error in its more profound, original knowledge, however, the mind cannot accept. The unquestionable truth of that knowledge is the very presupposition upon which all recognition of both error and validity in the realm of mediate knowledge finally rests. In ordinary sense-experience, in dealing with the facts of history, and in moral conduct, the ground of an immediately-felt certainty can upon reflection be brought to light and the validity of judgment in these areas can be substantiated in terms of more ultimate truth. But in two significant instances proof of truth is not possible. In our recognition of the ultimate *a priori* truths of human reason and in aesthetic judgment of the higher order, the feeling of truth is immediate, inescapable and completely irreducible.

Logical effort to “prove” the *a priori* truths of pure reason is obviously futile, always having recourse in the end to an immediate insight of reason which is itself validated only by the same inescapable “feeling of truth.” In the case of aesthetic judgment, this epistemological function of feeling is even clearer and less disputed. “The *Wahrheitsgefühl* is then the rational capacity as capacity of judgment in its immediate activity,” Fries writes, “in which it brings to consciousness, not one truth by means of another, but a concrete truth of the reason immediately and by itself. . . . Only by means of this feeling of truth

⁹ *Neue Kritik der Vernunft*, Vol. II, p.98; cf. also *N. Kr.* I, § 85.

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can we bring to light the fundamental truths originally grounded in our pure reason.”¹⁰

II

Upon this immediately- and inescapably-felt self-confidence of the reason in the ultimate validity of its deepest insights, Fries bases the positive statement of his own metaphysics. The major task of his *New Critique of Reason* (3 vols., 1807) is, therefore, to discover the original knowledge possessed by the pure reason and to demonstrate its validity. Thus he hopes to provide escape from the epistemological dilemma of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* by means of a more constructive development of its own profounder insights.

By way of introduction to his own position, Fries points to the refutation of the Kantian epistemological dualism involved in the very effort to state it. For, while denying the applicability of the *a priori* categories of the reason beyond the phenomenal realm, Kant himself derives not merely the fact, but also what he seems to know of the character, of the real world only by assuming the objective validity of these categories. “If we speak of a thing-in-itself, we already employ therein the category of substance,” Leonard Nelson writes in the spirit of Fries; “if we term this the cause of our perception, we thus relate it to the category of causality; if we attribute existence to it, we likewise employ the category of existence. The statement that all *a priori* principles are inapplicable to things-in-themselves leads, therefore, to contradiction.”¹¹ Actually the ultimate validity of its *a priori* knowledge is the *sine qua*

¹⁰ *Religionsphilosophie*, p.24; cf. also pp.24-27.

¹¹ *Über das sogenannte Erkenntnisproblem* (Göttingen, 1908), p.175. Nelson here provides a discerning advocacy of the Friesian epistemology.

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non of human reason, and the very attempt of Kant to deny that validity clearly indicates as much.

Such a conclusion might well prove less favorable to religion than the agnosticism of Kant, if it involved a thoroughgoing assent to the naturalistic world-view of the sciences. But that outcome is no more acceptable to Fries than to Kant. Kant tries to save religious faith by denying the objectivity validity of scientific knowledge, and he based this denial in large measure upon his classic statement of the "antinomy of reason." Fries undertakes to show the fallacy in Kant's handling of the antinomy, not in order to establish naturalism, but to refute it effectively. According to the Kantian statement of the antinomy of reason, irresolvable contradiction occurs when the *a priori* categories of the understanding are taken to be objectively valid. In the first place the natural universe must then be accepted as infinite and eternal, there being no intelligible stopping point either in time or space. Yet at the same time such an infinite regression in time or extension in space is not itself finally intelligible. Reality to be intelligible must in some sense be complete. In like manner, the universe must also be interpreted as infinitely divisible and complex. But reality is not intelligible as ultimately complex, for reason demands the simple and uniform as the basis of all complexity. Finally, an infinite contingency, a never-ending chain of cause and effect relationships, is essential to the rational explanation of the universe. Yet reason at the same time can never rest satisfied without a first cause, "a peg to hang the chain on."

An escape from this antinomy, however, is to be found, as Kant himself realized and as Fries reemphasized, in the fact that the subject in the above antitheses is after all not the same as that in the theses. The Kantian antin-

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omy has revealed the necessity of careful distinction between the phenomenal world of sense-experience (the world of science) and the real world of pure intelligibility; it has not necessarily invalidated the *a priori* knowledge of pure reason. What this antinomy really indicates, Fries maintains, is not the subjectivity of our *a priori* knowledge in general, as Kant argues, but rather the essential limitation and restriction placed upon that knowledge in the scientific world-view. Actually in the process of interpreting the data of the senses (the Kantian "schematism of the categories"), the pure *a priori* categories of the mind lose their absolute validity and are limited and restricted. This empirical schematism of the categories introduces an "imperfection" in the scientific world-view (*Natur-erkenntnis*) which becomes quite apparent when science is contrasted with the completely rational interpretation of reality (*ideal Erkenntnis*) found in the *a priori* knowledge of the pure reason itself.

In the "ideas of the reason" (the soul, freedom and God), employed by Kant as at most "regulative" ideals, pure reason provides from its own inner principles alone a completely rational knowledge of reality, Fries maintains. These "logical ideas," as he calls them, arise as a protest by the reason against the limitation placed upon its original knowledge in the empirical schematism of the *a priori* categories. Hence they are essentially negative in character. They express only a final rejection by the reason of the incompleteness and imperfection that characterizes our scientific knowledge; they provide no further concrete, positive knowledge of the real world.¹²

To account for these logical ideas of the reason Fries posits a higher or "ideal schematism of the categories" in

¹² *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*, pp.48-52; *N. Kr.* II, pp.121-125.

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which the ideas of the soul, freedom and deity are derived directly from the rational categories themselves. In this process the *a priori* categories are “completed”; that is, the restriction and limitation imposed by the data of sense-experience upon the conceptual knowledge of the phenomenal world is removed and an ideal view of reality as a completely intelligible world of rational being is achieved. As a matter of fact, the ideas of the soul, freedom and deity are derived by Fries from a higher schematism of Kant's three “peculiarly metaphysical categories” (substance and accident, cause and effect, and community through reciprocal action). In his *New or Anthropological Critique of Reason*, Fries rejects Kant's “logical deduction of the categories” with its neat formalism as unconvincing, insisting instead upon an “anthropological” deduction. This approach permits him to recognize as *a priori* those categories of human thought that experience itself reveals to be primary and ultimate; and leads him to emphasize particularly the categories of substance, of causality, and of community through reciprocal action.¹⁸

When time-space attributes are removed by an “ideal schematism” from the category of substance, the quantitative world of material objects disappears, but the qualitative attributes of substance lose only their phenomenal form. Real, that is, completely intelligible, substance is then revealed as spiritual being in a complex of qualitative attributes without spatial or temporal limitation. This is actually the meaning contained in the idea of the *soul*, in which, according to Fries, the true nature of substance is immediately known. The category of causality in like manner, when freed from the restriction imposed by time-space relationships, no longer involves

¹⁸ cf. Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp.49-51.

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an infinite conditionality. Pure and completed causality is rather that creative causality which finds intelligible statement in the idea of an unconditioned *freedom* of the moral will. Finally, the category of community through reciprocal action (the most general form of the idea of universal unity and necessity), when all time-space limitation is removed, points to an eternal ordering of things in accord with final purpose; and this the idea of deity expresses.¹⁴

This ideal schematism of the *a priori* categories provides for Fries the only possible theoretical validation of our knowledge of the real world. In his opinion it affords a convincing demonstration that such "ideal" knowledge of the soul, freedom and God arises from the pure reason itself and is likewise in ultimate harmony with the *a priori* knowledge contained in the rational categories of the understanding, when that knowledge is freed from all empirical limitation.

Moreover, both the scientific interpretation of the natural universe and the purely ideal interpretation of the intelligible world must according to Fries be described as types of rational conviction, and only as such are forms of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). "Just as I cannot prove that there is a God, but only that every finite reason has faith in God, even so I also cannot prove that matter exists, but only that every finite reason has knowledge that there is matter," he writes.¹⁵ As the foregoing analysis has made clear, however, this rationally necessary faith in God (*Glaube*) is a higher form of knowledge for Fries than is the scientific interpretation of nature (*Wissen*).¹⁶ For it

¹⁴ *N. Kr.* II, pp.221-293; *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*, pp.128-136.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp.118-119.

¹⁶ The relation of *Wissen* and *Glaube* to *Erkenntnis* in general is an important aspect of the Friesian epistemology and difficult to express clearly in English. Cf. Otto's statement of the Friesian point of view:

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is only in such a rational faith that the eternal nature of things is immediately known to reason. Fries thus rejects the Kantian reduction of the cardinal tenets of religious faith to a sort of moral pragmatism. Religious faith is not merely a necessary bulwark for man's moral life; it derives from the fundamental principles of pure reason itself.

Yet despite the high place in the Friesian philosophy accorded rational faith (*Glaubenserkenntnis*), such faith does possess serious epistemological limitation. It is a valid knowledge of reality, but it is not and cannot be a positive knowledge. The ideas of the soul, freedom and deity arise as a negation by the pure reason of the restriction imposed upon it in the empirical schematism of the categories. We know immediately and certainly in rational faith *that* the soul, freedom and deity are aspects of the real world. *What* they are as such, however, can only be stated negatively in the assertion that no empirical attributes are applicable to such realities.

To describe the soul or God as eternal, for example, may suggest a positive knowledge; but upon closer examination the only conceptual meaning of this attribute is seen to be a denial that either God or the soul is conditioned by temporal limitation. To speak of God as omnipotent or omniscient is again simply to assert that the restrictions upon power or wisdom, as these are known in the phenomenal world, do not apply to the deity. A positive conceptual knowledge of human freedom is similarly impossible. In rational terms freedom can only mean a negation of the determined cause-effect sequence of empirical rela-

"Alles Wissen ist Erkenntnis. Aber nicht alle Erkenntnis muss Wissen sein. Wir reden ausdrücklich von 'Glaubens-erkenntnis.'" (*Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie*, p.10n.)

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tionships. Thus for speculative reason the ideas of faith are not positive concepts of a metaphysical sort at all but rather, as Fries suggests, "incomprehensible mysteries."¹⁷

III

In moral ideal and conduct these fundamental ideas of religious faith are vitalized and given practical expression. The moral life is for Fries as for Kant the noblest expression of spiritual personality, and as such is conditioned by the deepest insights of the rational spirit. Fries is quite at one with Kant also in recognizing that faith in freedom, immortality and God, in which this rational ideal finds explicit culmination, is essential to the moral life. In moral conduct there is indeed a practical and vital apprehension of the meaning of the soul, freedom and deity which rational concepts cannot provide.¹⁸ Yet there is a significant modification of the Kantian philosophy made by Fries at this point in his contention that the rationally necessary faith of religion is not initially a postulate of the moral consciousness, but rather an expression of the immediate knowledge of pure reason (*Glaubenserkenntnis*) by which morality itself is conditioned. The moral imperative is not granted the complete autonomy accorded it by Kant. The "ought" of conscience derives rather for Fries from a dignity possessed by human personality (*Würde der Person*) as it exemplifies an eternal worth and purpose. This transcendent purpose undergirds all human purpose and all moral conduct, and it alone validates the Kantian principle that a person must always be treated as an end, never as a means.

¹⁷ *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*, p.122; *Religionsphilosophie*, pp.97-107.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.127, 133-136, 148-160.

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For moral theory the eternal purpose of the universe must ever remain a matter of faith, incapable of validation except as a logical idea of the pure reason. But in aesthetic experience Fries finds an immediate awareness of such objective purposiveness as an empirical fact. The *aesthetic* ideas of the beautiful and the sublime hold a place in his philosophy as essential indeed as that given to the *logical* ideas of the soul and deity. The ideas of the beautiful and the sublime involve something more than the mere subjective relationship of a beholder to an object. In these ideas predicates of value are unquestionably attributed to an external reality, even though the act of predication is entirely a matter of feeling. And even though it is impossible to show by logical analysis the validity of our conviction, an eternal fitness and purpose is dimly recognized in the grandeur and sublimity of the natural universe.

Aesthetic judgments of the higher order make claim, just as do logical judgments, to objective validity and are characterized by the same immediate and irresolvable *Wahrheitsgefühl*. In such judgments there is indeed according to Fries an intuitive apprehension (*Ahndung*) that the world of nature is itself ordered in accord with the inner principles of the reason. The ideas of the beautiful and the sublime reflect our immediate awareness of a rational harmony and unity in the manifold of sense perception; and in these ideas the phenomenal world is recognized as in some fashion ordered by a higher purpose and worth that completely accords with the deepest ideal of the human spirit. "The aesthetic judgment is the instrument of *Ahndung* and its aesthetic world-view," Fries writes, "in which the mysterious ordering of the phenomena of nature in conformity to the ideas of faith, and the per-

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fection and independence of the spirit, is recognized by means of the inexpressible middle term of beauty.”¹⁹

Aesthetic insight of this sort does not pertain, however, merely to the world of external phenomena. Its highest expression is rather to be found in a recognition of the sublime in the inner life of the human spirit. The whole of ethics is conditioned for Fries by immediate awareness of an inherent dignity of human personality in the sublimity of man’s spiritual life; and the dynamic of moral conduct is thus ultimately derived from an insight essentially aesthetic in nature.

This insight is immediate, as contrasted with the mediate, conceptual knowledge of the natural sciences (*Wissen*). It is positive as compared with the purely negative knowledge contained in the ideas of reason (*Glaube*). And its immediate and positive expression lies in the realm of feeling alone, feeling not resolvable into either rational concept or logical idea. “We distinguish *Wissen*, *Glauben* and *Ahnden* as three distinct types of conviction,” Fries states, “entirely different from each other.” “*Wissen* means only the conviction of a complete knowledge, the objects of which are known through perception; *Glaube*, on the other hand, is the necessary conviction of pure reason, which can come into our consciousness only in concepts, that is, in ideas; but *Ahndung* is a necessary conviction of pure feeling.”²⁰

In the independent insight that characterizes aesthetic experience there is concrete and certain, if somewhat ob-

¹⁹ *Religionsphilosophie*, p.88. The principle of beauty is conditioned in the Friesian aesthetics by the immediate harmony of perceived forms with the *a priori* categories; the principle of sublimity by a similar harmony of perceived forms with the ideas of reason (*ibid.*, p.167). Cf. also *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*, p.223.

²⁰ *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*, pp.63-64.

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scure, awareness of an eternal fitness and purpose present in and conditioning the temporal and finite. The phenomenal world is thus dimly apprehended as in some fashion a valid appearance of the real world of intelligible being, and the dualism of the Kantian epistemology is finally transcended. Were it not for our immediate aesthetic apprehension of such eternal fitness and purpose underlying and ordering the contingent world of nature, rational faith would ever remain in opposition to conceptual understanding and reason apparently divided against itself. But in *Ahndung* there is for Fries empirical validation of the faith of the human spirit in the intelligible world as objectively real. The apparent conflict between the ideal world of rational faith and the phenomenal world of natural science is resolved, and the essential principles of the former are apprehended as the ultimate nature of the latter.

Of equal moment perhaps for Fries, this immediate awareness of an eternal worth and purpose in and beyond the natural universe gives rise to religion and the life of piety. It provides the emotional dynamic essential to vital religion, a dynamic not to be found in a purely rational faith in God, freedom or immortality (*Glaube*). Indeed, as already pointed out, Fries does not merely accept such aesthetic insight (*Ahndung*) as the source of vital religion. He actually identifies piety with the unique emotional mood (surrender to God, devotion and exaltation) aroused thereby, and in these unique religious feelings he finds the only positive concrete knowledge of the ideal world itself.

The feeling of pure exaltation, for example, Fries interprets as the initial expression of an immediate knowledge of man's eternal destiny. In this vital religious feeling,

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aroused by the sublimity both of the natural universe and of great spiritual achievement, the idea of the soul, which was a necessary aspect of rational faith but was interpreted only in a negative fashion, now becomes positively meaningful. In the unique quality of such exaltation something of the eternal nature and worth of the human spirit is known immediately and certainly, even though in terms of pure feeling alone. This insight begets the life of piety and according to Fries provides the dynamic and justification of moral conduct as well. Upon its dim apprehension of the ultimate worth and dignity of human personality the validity of all finite purpose and morality ultimately depends.

The freedom and moral autonomy of the human spirit can be no more adequately interpreted in conceptual terms than can its eternal worth and destiny. In the consciousness of sin and guilt, however, Fries sees a quality of religious feeling in which freedom is known immediately, not simply as logical idea but as in some way actual in human experience. The sense of sin is not itself an element of piety for him, but rather a preparation for it. Awareness of our own inescapable moral unworthiness and guilt produces a deep sense of humility, a discarding of all confidence in human ability and merit, and thus a surrender to God. In this unique consciousness of humility and self-surrender as well as in high moments of devotion and exaltation, piety finds living expression. But in the sense of sin which precedes piety there is a profound and immediately-felt awareness of man's own freedom and moral responsibility too convincing ever to be rejected.

The idea of deity, however, is the highest form of ideal knowledge. Upon the moral order and purpose of the universe, that is, upon the providence of God, depend both

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the creative freedom and the eternal destiny of the human spirit. "We reverence in this ideal of the reason the ideal of the highest good as the one holy first cause in the eternal being of things," Fries writes.²¹ A conceptual statement of the nature of deity is for him manifestly impossible because of the necessary limitation of all rational concepts to the phenomenal world. In the pious mood of devotion, however, a mood aroused by the majestic beauty of the natural world, there is an immediate certainty of such eternal purpose and goodness. The providence of God, which forever escapes rational comprehension, is apprehended dimly but surely in the spirit of deep religious devotion.

Religious feeling, then, is for Fries the initial and most significant expression of a judgment essentially aesthetic in character. Such feeling alone reveals the ultimate significance of the beautiful and the sublime. It likewise provides the dynamic of all high moral endeavor; affords empirical validation of the noblest ideas of the pure reason itself; and thus effectively fashions the aesthetic, the moral and the rational into the unity of spiritual personality. Yet this religious insight must always remain as *Ahndung*, as immediately-felt presentiment or divination. Only by analogy and in symbol can the convictions of religion find expression beyond the realm of feeling. For only thus can one bridge the gap between the restricted, conceptual knowledge of the phenomenal world that the sciences provide (*Wissen*), and the completed ideal knowledge of the intelligible world that is contained in rational faith (*Glaube*).²² All conceptual statements of our unique reli-

²¹ The major section of *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung* (pp.258-327) and an equally important part of the *Handbuch der Religionsphilosophie* (pp.90-157) are devoted to this subject.

²² Three types are distinguished by Fries in his discussion of religio-

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gious knowledge of eternal life and divine purpose are inevitably anthropomorphic, mere analogies vitiated by the limitation of human understanding to time and space. All ideal formulations of our rationally necessary faith in God, freedom and immortality can be no more than negations of this empirical limitation. Religion is concerned with spiritual realities shrouded in ultimate and irresolvable mystery for the finite mind, yet in some way immediately apprehended in intuition and feeling, and acknowledged in moral ideal and conduct.

IV

The cardinal doctrines of religious faith are thus given both theoretical and practical verification in the Friesian idealism, and a third, independent type of knowledge is recognized in aesthetic experience by which their objective truth is empirically validated. Religion is not simply freed from the dependence upon morality in which Kant had placed it, but also is revealed as itself providing the dynamic of moral practice and the justification of the moral imperative. By religious insight alone is the gulf bridged between the intelligible and the phenomenal world, and the epistemological dilemma of Kant's philosophy resolved. The Friesian interpretation of religion, moreover, while in general accord with that of Schleiermacher, is not expressed in the romantic and poetic spirit of the *Addresses on Religion* but in the concise and logical terminology of the Kantian *Critiques*. It is easy to understand its appeal to Otto at a time when, influenced already by both

aesthetic knowledge: (1) the immediate truth of religious feeling; (2) the mediate knowledge of aesthetic ideas, the beautiful and the sublime; and (3) the symbolic knowledge of religious cult, poetry and mythology. (*Religionsphilosophie*, pp.251-252.)

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Kant and Schleiermacher, he was himself seeking some sound philosophical foundation for religious faith.

As a matter of fact, the religious significance of the Friesian idealism had been emphasized earlier by W. DeWette, a friend of both Schleiermacher and Fries. The same intellectual and religious tendencies that so strongly influenced Otto likewise shaped the thought of DeWette. Trained in the critical philosophy of Kant and the faith of Luther, and stirred by Schleiermacher's eloquent *Addresses on Religion*, DeWette enthusiastically endorsed the philosophy of Fries and based his own Christian theology upon it.

In general agreement with Schleiermacher, DeWette defines piety in terms of feeling but accepts the Friesian theory of *Ahndung* as a desirable development of Schleiermacher's religious epistemology. It is the task of Christian theology in his opinion to provide a concrete psychological analysis of religious experience in its individual and historical manifestations and by this means to give positive content to the ideal or purely formal concept of religion in the philosophy of Fries. In his own interpretation of Christian experience from this point of view, however, DeWette treats the immediately-felt insight (*Ahndung*) contained therein as a specifically religious rather than an aesthetic type of intuition. Both the Christian idea of the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the atonement are cited by him as expressions of *Ahndung*; and he explicitly recognizes that an immediate apprehension of the teleological character of the historical process, like insight into the larger purposiveness of the cosmic order, is to be gained only in independent religious intuition.²³

²³ The more important of DeWette's studies in this connection are his *Ueber Religion und Theologie* (1815) and *Ueber die Religion, ihre*

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DeWette's definition of theology suggested just the sort of "empirical science of religion" (*Religionswissenschaft*) in which Otto himself, when a member of the religio-historical school, was interested. In DeWette's treatment of *Ahndung* Otto found a modification of the Friesian epistemology that unquestionably paved the way for his own theory of "divination," and the concept of religion outlined in DeWette's theological studies is remarkably similar to that later formulated by Otto. During his years at Göttingen indeed Otto was as thoroughgoing a disciple of Fries as DeWette had been. In his study of *Naturalism and Religion* (1904) he defended religious faith in essentially Friesian terms against the attack of scientific naturalism. Then in his *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie* (1909) he even more explicitly adopted in its entirety the "transcendental idealism" of Fries, accepting both the specific concept of religion and the general relationship of religion to knowledge, morality and aesthetics proposed by Fries. The Friesian emphasis upon the essential mystery in religion, and the theory of *Ahndung* as a dim but certain apprehension in religious feeling of an eternal purpose within and beyond the phenomenal world of nature, particularly appealed to Otto at this time. "To be aware of this eternal purpose, and to live in relation to it, is Religion," he affirmed.²⁴

The broad historical and psychological analysis of religious experience which Otto undertook in his later studies, however, gradually caused him to modify the

Wesen und ihre Erscheinungsformen und ihren Einfluss auf das Leben (1827). The third section of Otto's *Philosophy of Religion* contains a rather full analysis of DeWette's thought.

²⁴ *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.124; cf. *ibid.*, Chs. VII-X, XVI in general; and *Naturalism and Religion*, pp.39-40, 43, 76, etc.

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position adopted in his early *Kantisch-Friesche Religionsphilosophie*. He came to feel that Fries, although interpreting lucidly the rational and moral aspects of the religious consciousness, had missed the autonomous religious element. Man's knowledge of deity, while an aspect of the deep *a priori* knowledge of human reason, was for Fries a rational and moral interpretation of reality, not a peculiarly religious one. The essential meaning of deity is found by him in an eternal purpose apprehended in the majesty and beauty of the natural universe; no independent religious knowledge of God is recognized. Religious experience effectively unites the ideas of reason, the purposes of morality, and the insights of aesthetics. Religion is an independent *form* of apprehension, but in Fries' view contains no autonomous meaning or value of its own.

The sense of numinous sanctity, the conviction of sin and the assurance of salvation contain, according to Otto, ultimate meaning and value not comprehended in the moral category of purpose or the aesthetic idea of beauty. In both Christian and non-Christian thought, he also found persistent intuitions of deity that were not reducible to the Friesian idea of eternal purpose and fitness. Accordingly, in his *Idea of the Holy*, he distinguishes the holy as an autonomous religious category, independent of the categories in which rational, moral and aesthetic meaning and value are expressed; and treats divination as a specifically religious rather than an aesthetic apprehension of deity. The complete independence of religion, both in the domain of value and of knowledge, is thus established, but obviously by means of a rather far-reaching modification of the Friesian philosophical system. In substituting an autonomous religious category (the holy) for the moral and rational idea of purpose upon which Fries bases

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religion, Otto surrenders the bond of unity in man's spiritual life which for Fries is the primary contribution of religion. Of equally serious consequence he hereby removes the Friesian bridge between the ideal world and the world of nature, and is confronted once more with the fundamental dilemma of the Kantian critical philosophy which the Friesian idealism had claimed to resolve.

Yet nowhere does Otto face directly the difficulties occasioned by such a radical autonomy of religion. The primary concern of his later studies is to mark off accurately that which is peculiarly religious and to present this clearly in its uniqueness. In this task he has been remarkably successful; but, despite his ingenious efforts to do so, he has been nothing like so successful in reuniting religion with reason, morality and aesthetic appreciation after having severed the Friesian bond between them. It is here perhaps that the most serious defect of his otherwise suggestive and penetrating interpretation of religion is to be found.²⁵

Actually had Otto recognized the comprehensive synthetic function of the category of the sacred as well as its autonomy in man's spiritual life he would have materially strengthened his *Idea of the Holy* and at the same time have conserved the soundest insight in the Friesian philosophy of religion. The unique moment of transcendent worth and being, which constitutes the essence of numinous sanctity, provides indeed just the element needed to undergird the idealism of Fries. The religious con-

²⁵ In an effort to combine the Friesian validation of religion with his own mature doctrine of religious autonomy, Otto is finally led to postulate two *a priori* elements in religious faith, one rational (moral purpose) and one non-rational (numinous sanctity). (*The Idea of the Holy*, pp.116, 140-146.) This desperate expedient unfortunately only succeeds in confusing both his own position and that of Fries.

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sciousness, as Otto interprets it, is the original source from which the transcendent character of truth, beauty and goodness ultimately derives.²⁶ Along lines tentatively sketched in the following chapters, it is possible not only to remove the difficulties in Otto's treatment of religion, morality and reason, but also to bring his doctrine of religious autonomy into accord with the essential features of the Friesian idealism. In this fashion a philosophy of religion can be developed in which Otto's own original religious insight is successfully combined with the enduring elements in his Kantian-Friesian philosophical heritage.

²⁶ cf. chapter VII, sec. IV, below.



C H A P T E R VI

THE RELIGIOUS *APRIORI*

THOSE CATEGORIES of thought that appear to be universal and rationally necessary in the interpretation of human experience are taken by Kant to be *a priori* principles inherent in the structure of the mind itself. Otto's broad historical and psychological study of religion gradually convinced him that the religious consciousness could only be explained in terms of such an independent and *a priori* category of interpretation. In his *Idea of the Holy* he accordingly attempted a philosophical explanation of religion in accord with this conviction and was soon recognized as among the foremost and most original exponents of the theory of the religious *Apriori*.

As already portrayed in some detail the religious interpretation of experienced phenomena as sacred or holy involves for Otto an autonomous meaning and value that can neither be derived directly from sense experience nor expressed fully in logical, moral or aesthetic categories. This interpretation or valuation finds expression instead in independent concepts of its own, of which the conviction of sin, the assurance of salvation and the idea of God are the more significant and unmistakable. In view of this fact, Otto maintains that an *a priori* religious category of meaning and value must be recognized, independent of, although comparable to, the *a priori* rational and moral categories identified by Kant. Upon this position he builds his own mature philosophy of religion.

THE RELIGIOUS *APRIORI*

I

The primary significance of the theory of the religious *Apriori* for Otto, it is important to note, lies not in its epistemological implications but rather in the explanation it provides of the uniqueness and complete independence of the religious consciousness itself. His interpretation of religion stands clearly and directly opposed to all psychological or sociological descriptions of its origin in terms that are essentially non-religious. Indeed, it was largely as an answer to such purely naturalistic accounts of religion that Otto formulated his theory of the holy as an *a priori* category. Long before this possibility flashed upon his mind, he was wrestling with the fundamental antagonism between evolutionary naturalism and religious faith. Thus in his early work on *Naturalism and Religion* (1904) he insists that there are unique and creative capacities in the domain of mind and spirit which evolutionary theories must necessarily, and with "natural piety" (to use Lloyd Morgan's suggestive phrase), accept as ultimate. For the spiritual freedom and creativity of the human mind to be brought into serious question by a theory of its own construction is dialectically humorous, although its practical consequences are tragic.

The scientific enterprise itself presupposes a free and creative mental activity, Otto points out, of which the individual himself is, as a matter of fact, immediately conscious. The source of religion is likewise to be found in an original and unique endowment of man's spiritual personality, indeed in its deepest constitutive principle. "Finally and highest of all we have the capacity of the human spirit to rise to religion and to all the higher values that are apprehended in feeling," Otto writes. "In science

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and art, in morality and religion, the spirit comes into possession of itself. As such it is a unique and strange guest in this world, incomparable with anything beneath or around it.”¹

Even at its lowest level of expression religion cannot be adequately accounted for as merely the combination or synthesis of non-religious emotions, attitudes, or ideas. The history and psychology of religion can describe the “evolution” of the religious consciousness from a primitive to a more mature level and thus perhaps determine what are its essential nature and fundamental laws. But such disciplines, Otto maintains, can never provide an explanation of religion in terms of something else that is more primary. Piety and faith spring directly from a unique religious predisposition and impulsion grounded in the very structure of the human spirit itself.

This conviction occasioned Otto’s vigorous attack in 1910 upon the evolutionary theory of religion outlined in Wilhelm Wundt’s influential treatise on *Folk Psychology*. Otto notes two fundamental fallacies in Wundt’s position. On the one hand, the primitive notion of souls, spirits, and gods is there treated as if it constituted the essence of religion; and, on the other, religion itself is interpreted as primarily a social phenomenon, the product of group fantasy and myth-making. Like many later psychologists and sociologists, Wundt writes as if a social explanation of primitive religious ideas and customs provided a complete account of the origin of religion itself. This Otto categorically denies.²

¹ *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht*, p.238; cf. the Eng. trans., p.384.

² cf. the English translation of Otto’s essay on Wundt, “The *Sensus Numinis* as the Historical Basis of Religion.” *Hibbert Journal*, January and April, 1932.

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Actually religion originates and finds its characteristic expression, as Otto's later studies so amply demonstrate, in unique feelings and valuations that precede all intellectual belief, including even the primitive mythology with which Wundt is concerned. And even more important, as Otto points out, the social and the individual expressions of religion cannot be separated in the manner that Wundt's theory implies. The development of religious attitudes and ideas in the group presupposes a native religious capacity in the individual as its necessary foundation, just as certainly as does every other aspect of the "group mind." While society may well inspire, unify and transmit the achievements of the individual, human society itself is only possible because man has the unique intellectual, moral and religious endowments which distinguish him from other biological species. Religion had its historical origin when man himself came into being, and can only be explained in terms of his own spiritual nature.³

The theory of the religious *Apriori* adopted in *The Idea of the Holy* gives final expression to this general point of view developed by Otto in earlier studies. The only reasonable "explanation" of religion is the religious consciousness itself. "Nature can only be explained," he writes, "in terms of initially-given ultimate natural forces and laws that are capable of investigation. It is meaningless to propose to go further and explain these laws themselves. Likewise in the domain of spirit the corresponding first principle from which an explanation is derived is just the rational spirit itself, with its predispositions, capacities,

³ Otto never faces directly the provocative social interpretation of the significance of the sacred in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. A searching critique of Durkheim's position, essentially in accord with Otto's point of view, is to be found, however, in C. A. Bennett's *Dilemma of Religious Knowledge*, Ch. V.

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and its own inherent laws. This has to be presupposed; it cannot itself be explained.”⁴

Among the original endowments of the human spirit, Otto is convinced, there is a religious principle of interpretation and valuation. This man brings with him, at least potentially, when he emerges as a human being. History merely provides the occasion for the religious interpretation of experience to find expression; no final “explanation” of religion can be found in the domain of historical or social forms. “Whoever proposes a history of the spirit (*Geistes-Geschichte*) must presuppose a spirit determinately qualified,” Otto writes; “whoever professes to give a history of religion, means the history of a spirit qualified for religion.” “Plainly then religion is only the offspring of history in so far as history on the one hand develops our natural predisposition for knowledge of the holy, and on the other is itself at times a manifestation of the holy.”⁵

Otto’s most revealing treatment of the religious *Apriori* is to be found in those passages where he compares it with aesthetic judgment. In even the crudest religious interpretation of experienced phenomena an analogy to the aesthetic is to be noted. “The first stirring of daemonic dread as the feeling of the ‘sinister’ already contains, moreover, a purely *a priori* moment,” he writes. “In this respect it is comparable to aesthetic judgment and the category of the beautiful. Utterly different as my mental experiences are when I recognize an object as ‘beautiful’ or as ‘horrible’ yet both cases agree in the fact that I ascribe to the object an attribute, a predicate of meaning, which I do not and

⁴ *Das Heilige*, p.149; cf. the Eng. trans., p.118.

⁵ *ibid.*, Ch. 24: “Religiöses Apriori and Geschichte,” pp.219, 220; cf. the Eng. trans., pp.180-181.

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cannot get from sense experience but rather ascribe to it by a spontaneous judgment of my own. Intuitively I apprehend in the object only its sense qualities and its spatial form, nothing more. That the specific meaning I designate as ‘beautiful’ applies to the object, or even that there is any such meaning at all, those qualities can in no way reveal or tell me. I must have an obscure conception of the ‘beautiful,’ and in addition a principle of subsumption by which I attribute it, else even the simplest experience of a beautiful object is impossible.”⁶

In the mature as in the primitive consciousness, the religious interpretation of experience, like the aesthetic, is dependent upon an autonomous category of meaning and value. Holiness can only be understood as beauty is understood. Thus to be “impressed” by the holiness of Christ, Otto describes as “to cognize and recognize in him a peculiar significance and to humble oneself before it. That is only possible, moreover, by means of a principle of recognition, comprehension, and valuation issuing from one’s own inner spirit, the ‘spirit within.’”⁷ “The facts of the numinous consciousness point therefore,” he concludes —“as likewise do also the ‘pure concepts of the understanding’ of Kant and the ideas and value-judgments of ethics or aesthetics—to a hidden substantive source, from which the religious ideas and feelings are formed, which lies in the mind independent of sense experience, a ‘pure reason’ in the profoundest sense, which, because of the surpassingness of its content, must be distinguished from both the pure theoretical and the pure practical reason of Kant, as something yet higher or deeper than they.”⁸

⁶ *ibid.*, pp.173-174.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp.202-248; cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.138, 164, 181.

⁸ *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.117-118.

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II

This interpretation of the religious *Apriori* is particularly significant because it involves a marked change in Otto's philosophy of religion. In his early *Kantisch-Friesche Religionsphilosophie* (published in 1909) he definitely rejected the theory as then presented by Troeltsch, terming the religious *Apriori* "a rather unfortunate phrase, beset with misunderstandings."⁹ His attitude at that time is not at all surprising, since the idealism of Fries, which he and his colleagues at Göttingen had adopted almost unaltered, runs directly counter to Troeltsch's theory. From the Friesian viewpoint, as developed by Otto himself in the study just mentioned, religious faith is an aspect of the general *a priori* knowledge possessed by the human reason, and is indeed a necessary outgrowth of pure reason. Religious experience does not in any sense involve an independent religious *Apriori*. The Friesian philosophy, as already pointed out, seeks rather to unite religious conviction more firmly with the *a priori* principles of pure reason, and with the fundamental principles of aesthetic judgment and moral practice, as the ground for their maximum coherence; it has no place for a separate religious *Apriori*.¹⁰

The contrast between Otto's early pro-Friesian interpretation of the *a priori* element in religion and that suggested by Troeltsch is a fundamental one.¹¹ Troeltsch's theory apparently involves the postulation of a number of independent *a priori* categories, one to account for moral

⁹ *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.18; cf. also pp.91-102, 123, 130.

¹⁰ cf. chapter V, above.

¹¹ This contrast has been forcefully put in an article by Karl Bornhausen, "Das religiöse Apriori bei Ernst Troeltsch und Rudolf Otto." (*Zeitschrift für Philosophie und phil. Kritik*, 1910, pp.193-206.)

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conviction, one for aesthetic judgment and one for scientific knowledge, as well as one that is distinctly religious. In his early work Otto followed Fries in accepting the unity of all *a priori* knowledge and consequently recognized no independent religious *Apriori* of the sort proposed to Troeltsch.

The Idea of the Holy presents a different view. A broader empirical study of religion had convinced Otto that the Friesian subordination of religious conviction to the categories of logical and aesthetic judgment was unsound. Troeltsch's theory of an independent religious *Apriori* seemed after all more nearly in accord with the facts than did the rather doctrinaire Friesian idealism. The position developed in *The Idea of the Holy*, however, is by no means identical with that suggested by Troeltsch. Indeed Troeltsch himself in a review of Otto's book roundly criticizes its approach as basically at odds with the epistemological *a priori* of Kant and hence, it is implied, not in harmony with his own view. "With the Kantian idea of the critical *Apriori*, that is, the expression of an inner rational necessity and validity, this purely psychological and anthropological approach has no connection—or very little," Troeltsch maintains.¹²

As a matter of fact, Otto does not attempt to interpret the religious *Apriori* as a purely epistemological norm, rationally necessary and universally valid, of the sort that Troeltsch suggested but never actually identified. His *Idea of the Holy* designates as *a priori* a category of meaning and value by which all genuinely religious feelings and convictions are conditioned. In fact the religious *Apriori* is for Otto primarily an axiological rather than an epistemological norm. Yet he does base his theory

¹² "Zur Religionsphilosophie," *Kant-Studien*, 1919, p.70.

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definitely upon the general Kantian concept of the *Apriori*. The immediately-felt certainty, the axiomatic quality and universality of religious conviction, which Otto knew in his own experience and found confirmed throughout the history of religion, cannot be explained, he is convinced, in terms of the data of the senses alone. These characteristics of the religious consciousness derive rather, he maintains in Kantian fashion, from an autonomous category of interpretation and valuation grounded in the mind itself and brought by it to the interpretation of experience.

The idea of God or of deity is not then an *a priori* religious norm, as Troeltsch had been rather inclined to believe. God is rather that factor in experience which has the value of the holy. Thus the idea of God, like all other religious ideas, is dependent upon an autonomous category of meaning and value (the sacred or holy) which finds expression initially in numinous feeling and only secondarily in the realm of idea (or ideogram). It is here that Otto's conception of the religious *Apriori* differs most directly from that of Troeltsch. But with Troeltsch he agrees in accepting an autonomous religious *Apriori*, independent alike of the *a priori* categories of logical understanding and of moral and aesthetic judgment. To this extent both Otto and Troeltsch definitely modify the theory of the *a priori* as originally formulated in the critical philosophy of Kant. Yet their modification is actually in general accord with the spirit of the Kantian philosophy, and provides a development of the analysis of *a priori* knowledge that Kant himself suggested but did not complete.

Troeltsch was especially concerned to emphasize this fact in defending his own theory of the religious *Apriori* against the Marburg Neo-Kantians. It was the contention

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of this school that *The Critique of Pure Reason* provided the only genuinely Kantian interpretation of *a priori* knowledge. Troeltsch points out, however, that Kant in his later *Critiques* definitely recognizes an *Apriori* that "does not signify the synthetic unifying function of scientific comprehension, but . . . the rationally necessary method of considering and evaluating given actuality from ethical, religious and teleological-aesthetic standpoints." This distinction between "the *a priori* of science and that of the ethical-religious-aesthetic forms of value-judgment," Troeltsch insists, is essentially Kantian, and he claims accordingly that he rather than the Marburg Neo-Kantian school has the better right to the authority of Kant.¹⁸

Yet Troeltsch does not, as a matter of fact, develop adequately this aspect of Kant's philosophy to which he rightly calls attention. What Kant suggests is a distinction between *a priori* categories of theoretical understanding on the one hand and *a priori* categories of meaning and value on the other. Specific epistemological norms of the former kind are for Kant no more to be found in the moral than in the religious consciousness. Otto's recognition that the religious *Apriori* lies primarily in the domain of value and is only secondarily an epistemological norm provides not only a sound interpretation of religion, but a sound development of Kant's moral and aesthetic philosophy as well. Consequently Otto is able to identify the category of the holy as the religious *Apriori* and to define its nature with some degree of accuracy and comprehen-

¹⁸ "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori," *Gesammelte Schriften* II, pp.757-758, 762. Troeltsch elsewhere more definitely describes the Kantian distinction as that between "die naturwissenschaftlich-kausalgesetzliche Vernunft und die geschichtswissenschaftlich-wertgesetzliche Vernunft." (*Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie*, p.27.)

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siveness; while Troeltsch could only insist upon "the existence somewhere in religion of an *a priori* element" which he was never actually able to identify.¹⁴

The soundness of Otto's approach is clearly indicated by the vigorous, if somewhat misdirected, attack upon the theory of the religious *Apriori* in John Baillie's able work, *The Interpretation of Religion*. Professor Baillie insists that although the phrase "religious *Apriori*" looks at first sight so Kantian, no phrase could really be less in accord with the spirit of the Kantian system, or more calculated to bring chaos and confusion into its leading principles. Kant's great championship of a two-fold avenue of knowledge is, he feels, stultified by Troeltsch's attempt to find a third such avenue in the religious consciousness. Kant wisely affirmed that no "specifically theological propositions" are genuinely self-evident or *a priori*, and in Professor Baillie's opinion neither Troeltsch nor Otto has disproved that assertion by offering a convincing deduction of the *a priori* categories of the religious consciousness.¹⁵

Throughout his discussion, however, Professor Baillie mistakenly assumes that Otto's theory of the religious *Apriori* like that of Troeltsch involves the acceptance in religious experience of an independent epistemological norm from which are derived universally valid theological propositions. This leads him to seize upon quite genuine but secondary defects in Otto's position and to overlook its genius. Thus he concludes his comment upon *The Idea of the Holy* as follows: "There is therefore no such thing as a 'religious *a priori*'; which is the same as to say that

¹⁴ cf. chapter I, section IV, above, for a more detailed analysis of the thought of Troeltsch.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, pp.243-245.

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no specifically religious doctrine can be regarded as strictly self-evidencing and epistemologically primary—a conclusion which surely commends itself to our common sense.”¹⁶

Actually Otto’s contribution to the subject is made just at this point. The religious *Apriori* is for him an autonomous category of meaning and value (the sacred or the holy). In man’s sense of the sacred Otto finds an independent religious awareness of meaning and value, which exercises its own unique and inescapable claim upon the human spirit, comparable to that involved in the moral imperative and in awareness of the beautiful. His theory does not involve the acceptance of any specifically religious doctrines as epistemologically primary; nor does he discard Kant’s binary division between the *Apriori* of theoretical reason on the one hand and the *Apriori* of moral and of religio-aesthetic value-judgment on the other. He does definitely claim for the religious consciousness, however, an autonomy comparable to that of moral and aesthetic judgment, and thus develops in desirable fashion the meaning of the *Apriori* suggested but never adequately developed in Kant’s later *Critiques*.

Professor Baillie’s forthright attack upon Otto and Troeltsch reveals clearly the fallacy of interpreting the religious *Apriori* in terms of specific theological propositions, even in terms of the idea of deity.¹⁷ But it thus actually affords additional confirmation of the soundness of Otto’s emphasis upon the primacy in the religious consciousness of an autonomous category of value. This

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.254.

¹⁷ Such as that attempted, for example, in a suggestive work by Rees Griffiths, *God in Idea and Experience* (Scribners, 1931). Griffiths undertakes to develop the theory of the religious *Apriori* along purely epistemological lines, combining the thought of Troeltsch and Otto with that of W. E. Hocking.

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emphasis Professor Baillie fails to appreciate largely because of his own semi-Kantian theory of religion. The heart of the matter has been pointedly put by W. M. Urban: "It was one of Kant's most serious limitations that while he recognized that the knowledge of nature . . . is conditioned by certain forms immanent in mind, to the equally necessary forms of the interpretation of life and the world, he allowed merely the character of practical postulates and regulative ideas. It escaped him entirely that reality, as we live it and know it, is likewise our reality only as the stuff of experience is formed by the categories of value . . . non-temporal and non-empirical forms of value are also the *a priori* of an intelligible world."¹⁸

III

The holy is thus for Otto an *a priori* and universally valid category of meaning and value by which the religious interpretation of human experience is conditioned. In his opinion, however, the category of the holy like all *a priori* categories likewise provides knowledge of an objective, transcendent reality. At this point Otto no longer follows the Kantian critical philosophy, but returns once more to the notion of the *Apriori* formulated in the Friesian idealism. With Troeltsch he accepts an independent religious *Apriori*, for which there was no place in the philosophy of Fries. But he continues to maintain with Fries that the world revealed by the *a priori* categories of human reason is the real world. This was the major modification of the Kantian philosophy urged by Fries, and Otto incorporates it as a fundamental aspect of his own theory of the religious *Apriori*.

¹⁸ W. M. Urban, *The Intelligible World* (Macmillan, 1929), pp.344-345.

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The religious category of meaning and value is thus both ultimate and *a priori* in the human mind and likewise in some sense objectively valid. Otto's attempt to substantiate the theory of value upon which this conviction depends is most fully worked out in five articles written in 1931-32, which draw together suggestions running through his earlier studies of religion. The publication of these articles in book form under the title, *Moral Law and the Will of God*, was announced several years prior to Otto's death but the volume never appeared.¹⁹

In these articles Otto points out that psychological analysis reveals two essential aspects in all our deepest and most significant experience of value. There is on the one hand a unique and pervasive subjective satisfaction felt by the individual himself; on the other the inescapable recognition that such value transcends all subjective limitation and exists in some sense in its own right, universal and objective. That which is felt by anyone to be useful or pleasant, of some value in satisfying one's own need or desire, whether so recognized by others or not, is marked by its *agreeableness*. This sense of the agreeable provides the essential criterion of subjective value, and in itself constitutes a judgment of value that relates the world of experience to our own purposes and interests. Subjective value is dependent then for its existence as well as for its recognition upon the purposes and interests of the individual.²⁰ In deeper and more significant judgments of value,

¹⁹ The five articles are: "Wert, Würde und Recht," and "Wertgesetz und Autonomie" (which appeared in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*); "Das Schuldgefühl und seine Implikationen," and "Das Verantwortungsgefühl" (in *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie*); and "Pflicht und Neigung" (in *Kant Studien*). Professor Otto himself informed me that he planned to use this material and this title for the Gifford Lectures which he was to have delivered at Aberdeen.

²⁰ "Wert, Würde und Recht," *Z. Th. K.*, 1931, pp.15-19. Cf. *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp.109ff.

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however, we are conscious that our own life and purposes are in some measure conditioned by the value here recognized, not its existence by our interests. It is not what it is because of us, but we are what we are because of it. Such values are recognized, immediately and inescapably, as obligatory and objective. They exist in some fashion in their own right, independent of and beyond the control of the individual who acknowledges but does not create them.²¹

Our recognition of loyalty to the fatherland as a duty, for example, involves a moral valuation of this higher sort. It imposes upon us an obligation that directly modifies our individual purposes, and produces a consciousness of approval much more profound and moving than the sense of the agreeable which accompanies satisfaction of physical desire. The scientist or the scholar likewise recognizes in truth not merely that which is useful and interesting but primarily that which has a claim upon him and upon all mankind and rightfully makes of him its servant. Aesthetic value of the higher order possesses a similar obligatory character. In the ideal of beauty the artist and the poet recognize the same sort of claim upon life and devotion as the scientist in truth and the patriot in loyalty. Nor do we admit the right of another to differ at will from such judgments of obligatory and objective value, whether moral, intellectual or aesthetic. Those who fail to accept these values we brand as criminal, ignorant, uncultured.²²

Because of this obligatory character, moreover, we recognize in such values a unique relation to reality. In some ultimate sense they "ought" to exist. As pointed out by W. M. Urban: "When we predicate value of anything, we pass from the mere concept of quality or essence to a certain bearing which this essence has on existence. It is 'worth

²¹ *Z. Th. K.*, 1931, pp.20-30.

²² *ibid.*, pp.29-33.

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existing' or 'ought to be.' In other words, in a predicate such as noble or beautiful there is, in addition to its essence, this unique relation to being."²³

The sense of sanctity and of holiness, as portrayed by Otto, in like fashion comprehends that which is deepest and most significant in our general value-consciousness. The vibrant, pervasive bliss and beatitude felt in the experience of salvation, is qualitatively distinct from all non-religious satisfaction. No other experience of value, whether moral, aesthetic or logical, provides such intense and overwhelming satisfaction for the individual. Concerning the unique subjective value of religion there is little room for question. But its "objective," transcendent character is in Otto's opinion a more significant aspect of the sense of sanctity. Saint and sinner, mystic and prophet alike recognize the absolute claim of the sacred or the holy upon life and conduct. All find in it an objectivity that completely overreaches their own individual interests or purposes, and a sense of obligation that is not moral, intellectual or aesthetic but peculiarly religious—a demand for the dedication of life to the will and purposes of God.

The relationship between reality and value is nowhere more apparent indeed than in the religious consciousness. Otto finds this especially well indicated in the mysticism of Eckhart. "True, Eckhart recognizes salvation also as of immeasurable subjective value, as the blessedness of being in God and with God," he writes. . . . "But right in the foreground of everything else, there is for him something entirely different: namely, desire to win the 'Esse' as *essential righteousness itself*, as the absolute objective value in contrast to the worthlessness of the mere 'creature,'

²³ *The Intelligible World*, p.142. Cf. Otto, *ibid.*, pp.96-97.

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sicut est in se.’”²⁴ This is the meaning of salvation not merely to Eckhart as a mystic, moreover, but to Eckhart as a Christian. For in this respect, as Otto points out, the mysticism of Eckhart does not differ from Luther’s doctrine of justification. Justification is for Luther a true “bestowal of being,” a sharing of the creature in the nature of the divine. The *homo justificatus* is the *homo deo non unitus sed unus*.²⁵ There is little room for question indeed that “he who seeks the salvation of his soul, in the Christian sense, is not in the first instance searching after something to make him happy, but to make him ‘holy,’ that is, for something of the utmost importance quite apart from his happiness or unhappiness.”²⁶

In the mysticism of Eckhart, as a matter of fact, the Christian doctrine of justification regains what Otto takes to be its original (Platonic) meaning—“a true participation in the eternal idea, which is itself identical with the eternal nature of God, and is therefore a real participation in God himself.”²⁷ This modified Platonism, to which his theory of value points, is noted by Otto several times but unfortunately is never developed in any detail. Clearest statement of the direction in which his thinking was moving is to be found in a brief monograph entitled *Freedom and Necessity*, upon which Otto was working at the time of his death and which was published posthumously.²⁸ The issue with which he was there wrestling is that of the apparent contradiction between the autonomy of moral

²⁴ *Mysticism East and West*, Part B. Ch. IV: “Salvation as Objective Value,” p.191.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.194-196; see also a later essay, “Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre und die Mystik” (*Sünde und Urschuld*, 5. Auflage, Essay 12.)

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.196.

²⁸ *Freiheit und Notwendigkeit*. J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1940.

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values and the grounding of all morality in the will of God. This was the issue underlying his earlier discussion of "Moral Law and the Will of God," and it is now described by him in somewhat broader terms as the problem of "*Autonomie und Theonomie der Werte.*" This same issue is raised in direct and challenging fashion in Nicolai von Hartmann's able work on *Ethics*, and it is with Hartmann's position that Otto is primarily concerned in his own monograph on *Freedom and Necessity*.

Otto had been much impressed by Hartmann's book at the time of its initial publication in 1926. It was in his opinion one of the truly great books of our age and he had his copy of the *Ethics* with him throughout his last illness. In Hartmann's general theory of value Otto found both substantial agreement with and strong support for the theory of value gradually taking shape in his own mind. But he was quite sure that Hartmann's antithesis between religion and morality was as indefensible as his general theory of value was discerning.

In the religious consciousness itself, Otto points out, there is to be found the very contradiction (*Freiheitsantinomie*) in terms of which Hartmann defined the antithesis between morality and religion. It is true, as Hartmann maintains, that salvation or redemption for the religious man is never gained through his own free moral effort but always is experienced as coming through the grace of God. But it is equally true that the sense of sin involves the very conviction which Hartmann has identified as the criterion of moral freedom, the clear and inescapable consciousness: you should have done otherwise and you could have done otherwise. A predestinarian necessity (*Unfreiheit*) is only

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one pole of the religious consciousness, not its complete content, as Hartmann tends to suggest.²⁹

Nor can religion be treated as essentially other-worldly in implication and morality as basically this-worldly, as Hartmann claims. Mature religion has a very definite and inescapable relevance to man's conduct in this world; so also the deepest insights of the moral consciousness inevitably transcend the world of human experience. The relation between man's moral endeavor in this world and a moral purpose transcending human life is the common concern both of high religion and profound morality.³⁰

The essential relationship between man's moral consciousness and his religious experience must be established, however, without destroying the autonomy of moral value. On that point Otto is quite clear. And in discussing it, he is led to deal again with the objective validity of all man's deepest experience of value. The autonomy of moral, aesthetic and intellectual values need not be destroyed, he insists, in order to establish a valid and meaningful *theonomy*. To argue otherwise is simply to repeat the old fallacy that opposed the laws of nature to the activity of God. "Correctly understood, the 'will of God' is then but our human expression for the obligatory moment that characterizes eternal value and its reflection in the creature," he writes. "The values which we experience in the world as obligatory or compelling are then not something separate from and parallel to the eternal meaning and value of God, but are that eternal meaning and value itself as apprehended in the world."³¹

This is as near as Otto comes to an acceptable interpretation of the relationship between the objective transcen-

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp.6-7.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.18 (order reversed).

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ent reference in all our deepest experience of value and the same unmistakably transcendent character of man's sense of sanctity. He is obviously working in this last essay on *Freedom and Necessity* toward a restatement of his Friesian idealism and suggesting a metaphysics which is axiological rather than logical in essence. The fundamental unity of the human spirit which Fries found in pure reason Otto now finds in the transcendent quality that marks all consciousness of obligatory and *a priori* value. That transcendent quality he identifies likewise as the core of the religious consciousness. Such an interpretation involves a basic modification of his earlier treatment of religion, reason and morality; it also suggests a broad synthetic function of the category of the sacred in the field of value which Otto himself never explicitly recognizes nor develops. As thus modified and developed, his theory of the religious *Apriori* can perhaps provide the foundation for a consistent and acceptable metaphysics. This is the contention in any case advanced in the succeeding chapter.



C H A P T E R V I I

MORALITY, REASON AND RELIGION

IN HIS DESIRE to free religion from every trace of dependence upon morality and metaphysics, and to exhibit unmistakably its unique meaning and value, Otto is led in *The Idea of the Holy* to a radical separation of the religious consciousness from every other primary category of meaning and value. This is a natural over-statement of a cardinal doctrine on his part; but here nevertheless is to be found the most serious defect in his otherwise discerning interpretation of religion, a defect indeed that tends to vitiate the very principle he sets out to establish.

Unquestionably Otto's approach has made an enduring contribution to the better understanding of religion. Until its uniqueness and independent significance have been recognized, religion will inevitably appear to be no more than naïve philosophy, once meaningful but now outgrown, or morality enlivened by emotion, or poetry beautiful and consoling yet largely illusory. Otto has convincingly disposed of these misinterpretations. With remarkable precision and suggestiveness he has identified the particular sphere of religion in human consciousness and analyzed the unique quality of emotion, the autonomous valuation and the independent apprehension of reality that distinguish vital religion in every age and culture. His synthesis of the major tendencies of modern German theology is a notable achievement; his anticipation of significant emphasis in

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contemporary British and American theology is equally striking.

Yet Otto's interpretation of religion cannot be accepted as entirely satisfactory. To establish the autonomy of the sacred, he is willing to sacrifice its comprehensive character; to distinguish religion from metaphysics and ethics, he describes it as essentially non-rational and non-moral in nature. The life of the spirit is thus compartmentalized and disunited; science, religion and morality are set at odds with each other; and no pathway is left from the world of sense experience to the world of religious conviction. Obviously Otto's zeal has carried him too far. The unifying function of religion in the life of the human spirit must be made clear at the same time that its autonomy, which Otto so forcefully portrayed, is safeguarded.

I

The endeavor to free religion from dependence upon reason and rationalistic metaphysics runs, of course, through the whole of modern German theology. It is to be seen in Schleiermacher's concept of piety and in Ritschl's idea of Christian faith, in Luther's more unconventional theological pronouncements and in the contemporary Barthian theology. Otto's insistence that the holy is "non-rational" in its deepest and most profound implications is but another statement of the same fundamental conviction. The demonstration of the non-rational character of religion might well appear indeed the underlying purpose of his *Idea of the Holy*. Its subtitle, "An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational," indicates as much. Throughout the entire volume, moreover, there is hardly a topic discussed, hardly a shred of empirical data introduced,

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that is not used in some fashion to substantiate this cardinal contention. A younger colleague of Otto's at Marburg has even gone so far as to suggest that the sub-title of *The Idea of the Holy* be taken as the major theme of Otto's theological work as a whole.¹

At the outset of his discussion, however, Otto quite explicitly recognizes the necessity and value of the contribution of reason to religion. The criterion of a religion's high rank and superior value he finds in an adequate *conceptual* statement of its faith. "Only in such terms is 'faith' as clear and intelligible conviction possible in contrast to mere 'feeling,'" he writes. What he is concerned to do, Otto asserts, is not to discard the rational element in religious faith but rather to show that the essence of religion (the holy itself) cannot be adequately and exhaustively interpreted in such rational terms. He proposes, therefore, to attack the destructive rationalization of religion without promoting thereby "an extravagant and fantastic irrationalism."²

In view of the fact that no aspect of Otto's thought has been more widely criticized, and none for that matter as generally misunderstood by British and American critics, his idea of the "non-rational" deserves careful consideration. "We mean by the 'rational' in the idea of the divine that in it which is clearly grasped by our powers of understanding and enters the domain of familiar and definable conceptions." Otto writes: "Beneath this sphere of clarity and lucidity, we go on to maintain, there lies a hidden depth, inaccessible to our conceptual thought but not to our feeling, and this we in so far term 'non-rational.'"

¹ Th. Siegfried, *Grundfragen der Theologie bei Rudolf Otto* (Gotha, 1931), p.1.

² *Das Heilige*, p.1; cf. the Eng. trans., pp.1-2, 61-62, and Foreword.

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"The non-rational is then not at all an 'unknown,' an 'unrecognized.' Were that the case, it would not concern us at all and we could not even state that it was non-rational. It is 'inconceivable,' 'uncomprehended' and 'incomprehensible' by the understanding; but it is apprehended in feeling."³

Much even of the abler criticism of this notion of the non-rational suffers from a lack of familiarity with the philosophy of Fries upon which Otto's position rests. Thus Leonard Hodgson, one of Otto's earliest British critics, suggests that Otto simply confuses the emotional with the non-definable and then erroneously assumes that the non-definable is non-rational. "There seem to be two strands in the texture of his definition," Hodgson writes; "according to one anything that cannot be defined is non-rational, according to the other the mark of the non-rational is that it produces in the mind an emotion and not a concept." Actually no ultimate concepts can be defined in terms of other concepts, Hodgson points out, yet they cannot *for that reason* be termed "non-rational." "If the immediate apprehension of truth is the primary activity of reason," he writes, "and if ultimates are indefinable, then the highest activity of reason is the immediate intuition of the indefinable."⁴

As a matter of fact, Otto's idea of the "rational" and the "non-rational" presented in the quotation above is directly determined by Friesian epistemology. Rational knowledge is confined to the categories of conceptual understanding distinguished by Fries, that is, scientific knowledge and

³ *ibid.*, pp.79, 175. Cf. the Eng. trans., pp.60-61, which gives in condensed form a section set apart in the later German editions as a separate chapter entitled, "Was heißtt Irrational?"

⁴ *The Place of Reason in Christian Apologetic* (D. Appleton & Co., 1925), pp.6-7.

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rational faith. "Non-rational" knowledge on the other hand is the transcendent divination of deity, which cannot be resolved into such rational concepts because of their limitation to the phenomenal world, but which is nonetheless immediately apprehended in religious feeling and ideogram (the Friesian *Ahndung*). Hodgson's criticism, although important, largely misses the point of Otto's religious epistemology.

In this insistence upon the "non-rational" character of religious knowledge Otto is primarily concerned, of course, to make clear and safeguard the independent character of religious insight and also the essential transcendence of deity. The holy, as immediately known in numinous feeling, can never be completely comprehended by the rational understanding; it is "inaccessible to our conceptual thought" because such thought is necessarily limited in its range and validity. Yet it is essential to high religion that the holy, thus apprehended, be supra-rational and not subrational, divine rather than demonic. Otto in his insistence upon the non-rational, even the irrational character of God as wholly-other,⁵ has provided no adequate criterion for making this distinction. Instead of selecting the ambiguous term "non-rational" to indicate the independent character of religious knowledge, he might well have confined himself to the less equivocal "non-conceptual." Leonard Hodgson is undoubtedly justified in questioning the desirability, even the defensibility, of describing as "non-rational" a knowledge that according to Otto's own theory of the religious *Apriori* is a possession of pure reason itself. For Otto not only agrees with Hodgson (and Fries) that "the immediate apprehension of truth is the primary activity of reason," but he quite ex-

⁵ *Das Heilige*, pp.38-39.

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plicitly describes religious insight as “a ‘pure reason’ in the profoundest sense, which, because of the surpassingness of its content, must be distinguished from both the pure theoretical and the pure practical reason of Kant, as something yet higher or deeper than they.”⁶ Implicit in his theory of the religious *Apriori* there is an essential relationship between religion and reason which is unnecessarily obscured by his description of religious knowledge as “non-rational.”

There is, however, another and more fundamental sense in which Otto interprets religion as non-rational and to this too little attention has been given. Occasionally in *The Idea of the Holy*, customarily in his later studies, he emphasizes the concern of religion for a *value* that is non-rational as well as its possession of *knowledge* that is non-conceptual. In all its forms, however diverse their outward appearance, the assurance of salvation involves “an ideal *good* known only to religion and in its nature fundamentally non-rational,” “a completely non-rational, or as we should say, a ‘numinous’ value,” Otto writes. “The longing after this utterly ‘irrational’ and infinite good which is salvation” constitutes the heart of vital religion for the Christian as for the Hindu, for the prophet as for the mystic.⁷

This use of the term “non-rational” is significant because it calls direct attention to the fact that in Otto’s mature theory of religion the non-rational (that is, non-conceptual) character of religious knowledge is occasioned by the nature of its source in immediate value-experience. Such knowledge is derived directly from an autonomous

⁶ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.118.

⁷ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.36, 171; *Mysticism East and West*, pp.24, 27; *India’s Religion of Grace*, pp.14, 122; *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man*, pp.50, 128.

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religious consciousness of meaning and value, not from a rational analysis of the date of experience; and on that account it escapes the grasp of all scientific concepts.⁸

Yet despite its usefulness in making clear this dependence of knowledge upon value in religion, the reference of "non-rational" in Otto's usage both to religious value and to religious knowledge is confusing, especially since Otto himself never clearly differentiates the two. As he discusses the non-rational character of religious *valuation*, it becomes clear indeed that he is actually concerned with the distinction between religious and *moral* value. The term "rational," which in his epistemological discussion refers to conceptual or scientific knowledge, is now employed to include moral value as well. He customarily describes the holy, for example, as a complex category containing rational and non-rational elements, which he then defines respectively as moral and peculiarly religious components.⁹ In its final implication, therefore, his treatment of religion as non-rational cannot be separated from his discussion of religion and morality. And that discussion unfortunately reveals even more sharply the difficulties occasioned by his radical and existential separation of religion from the other functions of the life of the spirit.

II

Without question Otto has convincingly identified the sacred as an autonomous and peculiarly religious category of meaning and value. But the obvious, indeed the essential, relationship of religion and morality is quite as apparent in his discussion as is the particular character and self-identity of each. Neither sin nor salvation, the basic

⁸ cf. chapter IV, above, for a full statement of Otto's position.

⁹ cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, Chs. XIII and XVII.

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religious categories in Otto's view, can be understood except as both religious and moral elements are recognized in them; and the permanent synthesis of the two in *the idea of the holy* is the cardinal emphasis of his work on that subject. Moreover, as he examines the historical development of the religious consciousness, he finds an essential relationship between the religious and the moral to be not only descriptively true but also necessary and self-evident. "The histories of religion recount, indeed, as though it were something axiomatic the gradual interpenetration of the two, the process by which 'the divine' is charged and filled out with ethical meaning," he writes: "and this process is in fact *felt* as something axiomatic, something whose inner necessity we feel to be self-evident."¹⁰

As Otto himself at once goes on to admit, however, for him "this inward self-evidence is a problem in itself," a problem created by the fact that he has treated religion and morality as in the same degree *a priori* and *sui generis*, existentially independent and in origin unrelated.¹¹ To account for the essential and seemingly axiomatic synthesis in the mature religious consciousness of these two originally "independent and unrelated" elements, he is finally "forced to assume an obscure *a priori* knowledge of the necessity of this synthesis."¹² Thus, as one of his critics aptly suggests, he is led to reaffirm in the interest of experience and common sense what in the interest of his own theory he had previously denied.¹³

¹⁰ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.140.

¹¹ *loc. cit.*: "We conclude then that not only the rational which here includes the moral but also the non-rational elements of the complex category of 'holiness' are *a priori* elements and each in the same degree." Cf. also, *ibid.*, pp.6, 113.

¹² *ibid.*, p.140.

¹³ John Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural*, p.63.

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To throw light upon this obscure *a priori* connection between religion and morality, which he has been forced to assume, Otto turns again to the philosophy of Kant. Kant, when analysing our knowledge of the natural universe, uses the term "schematism" to designate the process in which the concrete data of sense experience are subsumed under *a priori* categories of rational understanding. This Kantian principle appears to Otto to provide a plausible explanation of the essential relation of religion, morality and reason in the mature Christian consciousness. "Now the relation of the rational to the non-rational in the complex idea of the holy is just such a one of 'schematization,'" he writes. "The non-rational numinous fact, schematized by the rational concepts we have suggested above, yields us the complex category of the 'holy' itself, richly charged and in its full meaning."¹⁴ Each concrete moment of the *sensus numinous* in his opinion is thus schematized by a corresponding moral or rational concept. The *tremendum* (the daunting or repelling moment of the numinous), schematized by the rational ideas of justice and moral will, becomes known as the holy "Wrath of God." The *fascinans* (the attracting or alluring moment of the numinous), schematized by the ideas of goodness, mercy and love, is revealed as the infinite "Grace of God." The essential *mysteriosum* of the numinous, schematized by the idea of absoluteness, fundamentally transforms all rational attributes when applied to the deity.¹⁵

The mere statement of this position is enough to indicate that Otto at best has found in the Kantian theory, already obscure and questionable in itself, a very dim illumination of his own problem. He not only treats a partial

¹⁴ *Das Heilige*, p.68; cf. the Eng. trans., p.46.

¹⁵ *The Idea of the Holy*, pp.144-145.

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similarity between his own philosophy and that of Kant as a substantial identity, but actually discards the essential feature of this aspect of Kant's thought and renders it unintelligible in attempting to adapt it to his own needs. For Kant "schematism" is a process in which the particular data of sense experience assume meaning and intelligibility through subsumption under categories of the rational understanding (causality, substance, etc.). "Schematization" for Otto, if the analogy were a valid one, should be a process in which concrete qualities of numinous feeling were made intelligible through subsumption under rational and moral categories. Yet the central aim of his entire phenomenology of religion is to show that the essential significance of religious experience is not contained in such moral ideas but is rather expressed in autonomous religious categories of meaning and value.

To preserve the autonomy of religion Otto is forced, therefore, to complicate Kant's theory of schematism quite beyond recognition. In his own process of schematization two independent and *a priori* categories (the good and the sacred) are somehow synthesized in the idea of the holy to provide intelligible comprehension of numinous feeling and intuition, a function originally performed by one of them alone (the sacred). Then as if further to confuse the whole matter he elsewhere identifies the "wrath of God" and the "grace of God," here taken to be the products of schematization, as *ideograms* that merely suggest by analogy something of the transcendent character of the holy. It is hardly surprising then that Canon Streeter should dismiss Otto's whole notion of schematization as simply "ingenious nonsense."¹⁶

Indeed the only good thing to be said of Otto's theory

¹⁶ *The Buddha and the Christ*, App. II, p.322.

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is that in it he admits, by implication at least, an essential relationship between religion and morality. But he has certainly chosen a most unfortunate method of making the admission. As his critics here almost with one accord point out, his irreparable mistake lies in insisting upon an original and complete separation between the two. Religion and morality are logically and psychologically *distinguishable* in human consciousness. Each has its own unique sphere and makes its particular contribution to life and thought; and Otto's enduring achievement lies in aptly identifying that which is peculiarly religious. But religion and morality are not completely independent existentially. Once they have been radically separated they cannot successfully be united again. If they arise in complete independence, no essential bond can later be forged between them. Otto's endeavor to accomplish this feat simply bears witness to the inevitable failure in store for such an undertaking.

III

The defects that mar Otto's treatment of morality and religion are likewise to be seen in his discussion of the holy and the sublime. After having made consistent use of the similarity between aesthetic and religious judgment to establish the autonomy of the latter as against its threatened confusion with speculative reason or moral practice, he is finally unable satisfactorily to distinguish religion from aesthetics. His difficulty is accentuated, moreover, by the fact that in the Freisian philosophy upon which he is largely dependent at this point the religious is incorporated within the aesthetic. In his early statement of the *Kantisch-Friessche Religionsphilosophie*, Otto was deeply impressed by the position of Fries. "Unquestionably, the

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result of his investigation goes to prove that the profounder element, that which rises above ‘frigid taste’ to the vivid sentiment of beauty and sublimity, is actually of a religious nature,” Otto wrote at that time. “And how can this be gainsaid?” “The experience of the sublime has in itself so incontestably the nature of obscure comprehension of the ineffable, of a subsumption under the ideas of religion, that the point has never even been seriously controverted.”¹⁷

When formulating his own mature doctrine of the autonomy of religion, however, he feels compelled to retract this assertion. “Religious feelings are not the same as aesthetic feelings and the ‘sublime’ is as definitely an aesthetic category as the ‘beautiful,’ however widely they may differ,” he maintains in *The Idea of the Holy*.¹⁸ The tendency to treat the sublime as essentially religious in its implications he now regards simply as an error arising from the analogies between religious and aesthetic feeling. To account for this “error,” the prevalence of which is indicated by his own earlier work, Otto suggests a theory of the “association of feelings” comparable to the psychological law of the association of ideas. “A feeling, no less than an idea, can arouse its like in the mind,” he writes, “and the presence of the one in my consciousness may be the occasion for my entertaining the other at the same time.”¹⁹ Thus the close resemblance between religious feeling and the more exalted aesthetic emotions has occasioned in his opinion a frequent but erroneous identification of the two.

Such a theory, even if valid, fails entirely to explain

¹⁷ *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp.133-134, 142.

¹⁸ *Das Heilige*, p.58n.; cf. the Eng. trans., p.42n.

¹⁹ *The Idea of the Holy*, p.43.

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the striking parallel between the experience of numinous sanctity and the awareness of the sublime. The impression of something dynamic, something overpowering, awe-inspiring and incomprehensible, Otto himself recognizes as essential to both the sublime and the sacred. The sublime indeed, he is forced to admit, "exhibits the same peculiar dual character as the numinous; it is at once daunting, and yet again singularly attracting, in its impress upon the mind. It humbles and at the same time exalts us, circumscribes and extends us beyond ourselves, on the one hand releasing in us a feeling analogous to fear, and on the other rejoicing us."²⁰

Surely then it is meaningless to say that such feelings are merely "similar" to numinous feeling which has been described in exactly the same terms. To suggest that words used to define one experience no longer retain the same meaning when used to define another, is simply to surrender the possibility of intelligible communication. Before Otto finishes his discussion it becomes clear that he himself is quite conscious of this fact. It is, he admits, "inherently probable that there is more, too, in the intimate combination of the holy and the sublime than mere association of feeling; that while as a matter of historical genesis such an association was the means whereby this combination was awakened in the mind, and the occasion for it, yet the inward and lasting character of the connection in all the higher religions proves the sublime to be an authentic 'schema' of the holy itself."²¹

Unfortunately, however, the theory of schematization, upon which he here again falls back, explains the relation between the sublime and the holy no more meaningfully than

²⁰ loc. cit.

²¹ *Das Heilige*, p.63; cf. the Eng. trans., p.47.

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that between the moral and the religious. The fundamental confusion in Otto's use of this theory has already been pointed out. Such confusion is only made more apparent by the suggestion that a theory employed to explain the relationship of a unique religious feeling complex (*the sensus numinis*) to distinctly moral categories (goodness, righteousness and love) likewise defines the relationship of a complex religio-moral category (the holy) to a "definitely aesthetic" category (the sublime). Obviously Otto's idea of "schematization" is much too obscure and poorly defined in his own mind to merit very serious consideration.

As both Kant and Fries point out, the sublime is unquestionably a category with essential religious as well as aesthetic significance. Otto is led to deny this fact in *The Idea of the Holy* simply in the interest of his theory of religious autonomy, for his own empirical analysis thoroughly substantiates the Kantian-Friesian position. The sublime, like the holy, appears to be a complex category in which specifically religious and non-religious elements are inseparably united. In one case the sense of sanctity is united with distinctly moral values to produce the religio-moral category of the holy. In the other the sense of sanctity is similarly united with distinctly aesthetic values to produce the religio-aesthetic category of the sublime. In both cases, however, the complex category indicates a relationship much more essential than an association of feelings or a "schematization" of religious feeling by non-religious ideas. It reflects indeed the fundamental synthetic function of religion in the life of the spirit, for which Otto unfortunately failed to find a place in his own doctrine of religious autonomy.

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IV

Nowhere has the essential relationship of religion to truth, beauty and goodness been more succinctly presented than in Höffding's able work on *The Philosophy of Religion*. Emphasizing throughout his study that "in its innermost essence religion is concerned not with the comprehension, but with the valuation of existence," Höffding agrees with Otto that this religious valuation finds initial and primary expression in a unique quality of feeling. "The feeling which is determined by the fate of values in the struggle for existence is the religious feeling," he maintains; this feeling "is the essential element in all religions and all religious standpoints."²² The religious consciousness as he interprets it, however, is of a derivative or secondary character. Religion depends in the first instance upon moral, aesthetic and logical valuations, and simply reflects an added dimension, a cosmic status and significance, for these primary values. "For the core of religion consists in the conviction that no value perishes out of the world," Höffding writes. "Religious judgments, therefore, are secondary judgments of value; in comparison with the primary judgments of value . . . they are derivative."²³

Höffding himself does not designate the *sacred* as the category of meaning and value in which this religious judgment is expressed. But that identification is made in Wilhelm Windelband's influential essay, *Das Heilige*, where the general position suggested by Höffding is further developed. "The aim, the norm, the ideal of religion we term the sacred," Windelband writes. "By the sacred we do not mean any special class of universally valid values, such as those which constitute the true, the

²² *op. cit.*, pp.6, 104, 105.

²³ *ibid.*, pp.6, 104.

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good and the beautiful, but all these values together in so far as they are related to a suprasensuous reality.”²⁴

To assign to religion a special province of values of its own is in Windelband’s opinion both unsound philosophically and highly undesirable from the viewpoint of religion itself. The three functions of human consciousness in which independent valuation is possible (thinking, willing and feeling) are exhausted by logical, ethical and aesthetic values, he maintains. Hence there can be no further universal values that differ *in content* from these three classes. Moreover, the obvious concern of religion with the whole of life is unjustifiably disregarded when religious values are assigned a separate domain of their own and thus set apart from the other fundamental ideals and values of the human spirit. “Wherever this is attempted in practice, religion becomes rigid and sapless,” Windelband points out. “When it is done in theory, it prevents an insight into the essential relation between religion and secular life.” “When, in spite of this, we speak of a realm of religious values, which may be comprised under the title of the sacred, we mean that all these values may assume religious forms.” “If we seek the common feature in all the valuations which can thus assume a religious complexion, we find that it is always the relation of values to a supramundane, superempirical, suprasensuous reality. This element of Otherworldliness is so characteristic of the essence of re-

²⁴ *Präludien*, Vol. II (Tübingen, 1911), p.274; *Introduction to Philosophy* (Eng. trans. Henry Holt & Co., 1921), pp.324-325. “Das Heilige” is here translated “the sacred” rather than “the holy” since Windelband is explicitly identifying religious meaning as distinguished from moral value. The sacred is the title used, moreover, in the English translation of Windelband’s *Introduction to Philosophy* (Part II, Ch. 3, sec. 10), also entitled in the original, “Das Heilige.”

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ligion that, when it is excluded we get some such caricature as the Positivist Religion of Humanity.”²⁵

Windelband thus emphasizes the unique transcendent reference of the sacred, and distinguishes it as a specifically religious category of meaning and value from the categories in which moral and aesthetic valuation find expression. His position has had large influence. It was suggestively restated by W. M. Urban in a recent presidential address to the American Theological Association. Commenting upon Otto's *Idea of the Holy* Urban writes: “There is a sense in which we may speak of a numinous quality of experience which we may call the ‘quality of deity.’ It is, I think, not a unique datum of experience so much as a unique dimension which many data of experience may have. In the terminology of value theory, the ‘holy’ is not a separate value but a dimension of the other values, sensuous, aesthetic, moral.”²⁶

This is an interpretation that does full justice to the comprehensiveness of religion and to the essential relation of the religious consciousness to logical, ethical and aesthetic values. As has already been indicated, Otto in order to establish the autonomy of religion was forced to narrow the scope of religion unduly and set sanctity apart too completely from goodness, beauty and truth. On the other hand, the position of Windelband and Urban fails as definitely as that of Höffding to recognize adequately the autonomy of religion. It treats the religious judgment as secondary, necessarily dependent upon other more basic aspects of experience, and thus does violence to the deepest and most vital element in the religious consciousness itself.

²⁵ *Introduction to Philosophy*, pp.328, 324, 323.

²⁶ “Symbolism as a Theological Principle.” *Journal of Religion*, Jan. 1939, p.19. Cf. also J. Oman, *op. cit.*, App. A.

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A vigorous attack upon any such subordination of religion to secular values has been made by Richard Niebuhr in an essay entitled "Value-Theory and Theology."²⁷ As he points out, "there is one thing which all these theories have in common: They assume that men have a knowledge of absolutely valid values which is not only independent of their knowledge of God but which is also in some way determinative of God." "A theology which begins with values that are logically prior to God or that are of greater value than God, so that what is and what is not God may be determined by reference to them, makes him a means to an end and confounds worship."²⁸

This does not mean, of course, that value-theory has no place in the interpretation of religion. "There is no possibility of excluding value philosophy completely from theology," as Niebuhr himself recognizes; but as he also goes on to insist, "it is possible and necessary to interpret religion as an affair of *valuation* without assuming that such valuation must or can be made on the basis of a previously established standard of values." Of this autonomous religious valuation he writes: "Such a value-experience is primitive and original. It deals with the absolute source of all value by relation to which all other things have their value. To analyze this experience by reference to values known and regarded as absolute prior to the experience is to lose sight of this fundamental character and so to falsify it to an extent."²⁹

The facts of empirical religion, as Otto has so ably presented them, directly confirm Niebuhr's contention. They necessitate accordingly a more adequate recognition of the primacy and independence of religious valuation

²⁷ In *The Nature of Religious Experience* (Harpers, 1937).

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.95, 100, 102.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.111, 115.

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than that contained in the philosophy of Höffding and Windelband. Neither of these writers, as a matter of fact, approaches religion from within or interprets it in terms of its own unique insights and judgments, but both instead construct their philosophical systems upon secular values and then seek to find a place for religion within such systems. Höffding himself admits that his idea of the derivative character of religious value is not the result of an empirical analysis of religion. He finds no such awareness of a secondary and dependent character in the religious consciousness itself; indeed the exact opposite seems to be the case. "And as the religious feeling, notwithstanding its secondary character as compared with other feelings, can be experienced as immediately and keenly as they, so it may occur independently of these and react upon them," he writes. "Primary values often arise in a religious form from the outset, so that the two kinds of experience are made simultaneously." "And even when the difference between primary and religious values makes itself felt, the religious value may still retain its immediacy and independence."³⁰ While there is good reason then with Höffding to recognize an essential relationship between the religious consciousness and the higher secular values, there is none at all for accepting his conclusion that religion is derived from and existentially dependent upon our consciousness of such secular values.

V

In Otto's *Idea of the Holy* an interpretation of religious valuation is suggested that does justice to his own insist-

³⁰ *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp.104, 213, 214. Cf. S. Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, Vol. II, p.405: "The over-emphasis which Mr. Höffding . . . lays on the secondary character of religion in relation to goodness among other values is, I believe, a real defect of that admirable work."

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ence upon its primacy and autonomy and at the same time recognizes adequately the comprehensiveness of religion upon which both Höffding and Windelband place desirable emphasis. The religious judgment, as Otto describes it, relates *man as a whole*, human nature in its unity and fullness, to that which is ultimate and eternal. This valuation of human nature as such is immediate and primary; it is a judgment that precedes and conditions man's more mature comprehension both of his own nature and of the nature of reality. Nor does such uniquely religious valuation derive its characteristic content from any single aspect of human personality, whether thinking, willing, or feeling. As Windelband points out, these three areas of conscious activity provide the ground for logical, ethical and aesthetic values respectively. The "separate" domain of religion is constituted rather by the individual unity of personality as a whole in which the intellectual, the moral and the aesthetic are indissolubly grounded, that is, by *spiritual being* itself.

The essential relation of religious valuation to the being of man as such stands out clearly in Otto's historical and psychological portrayal of the holy. Goodness, truth and beauty were not and could not as yet be recognized as transcendent and sacred in the primitive religious consciousness. These axiological norms, of course, had not themselves emerged with any clarity or definiteness in man's mental development. But in the awesome majesty and mystery of the natural universe primitive man was dimly conscious of a numinous sanctity, an absolute worth and meaning, that conditioned his estimate both of himself and of the world in which he lived. In the development of the religious consciousness a striking connection between this sense of sanctity and the life-process as a whole is

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likewise to be seen.³¹ In life as man first conceived it, or in the lifeblood, his own *being* consisted. To be above life in value was the measure of sacredness; yet at the same time life and its material values were themselves recognized as in some sense sacred. In the early *tabus* with which the sense of sanctity encompassed the life-process, moral consciousness seems to have found initial expression.

Gradually, however, man came to see in the "soul" and then in spiritual personality, rather than in life or the life-blood, the essence of his being. To these in turn a sense of sanctity attached. They were accorded a dignity and worth, an absolute and eternal value, that transcended the temporal and transient world of nature. When those higher values (truth, beauty and goodness) in which spiritual personality itself found full expression were clearly apprehended by the human mind, their ultimate and absolute character was itself a reflection of the sanctity in which these values themselves in some measure participated as essential components of *spiritual being*. But as the ground and bearer of all value, such spiritual being continued to retain its own unique dignity and worth.³² The primary concern of religion with the destiny of man himself has never been displaced by a concern with the fate of values.

Sacredness then is not simply an added dimension of our consciousness of values, derived ultimately from the absolute character of the higher secular values. Rather these values are what they are only because the sense of sanctity is present already in all value-consciousness of a high order. As Höffding and Windelband maintain, religious judgment in its mature expression affirms the cosmic sig-

³¹ cf. J. Oman, *op. cit.*, p.68.

³² This point is made specifically by Th. Seigfried in a final comment on Otto's *Freiheit und Notwendigkeit* (p.23), which he prepared for publication.

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nificance of truth, beauty and goodness. This is the case, however, only because these values are constitutive elements of *spiritual being* itself, not because of the derivation of religious faith from the transcendent character of these secular values. In recent years it has become more and more apparent that our consciousness of the eternal worth and meaning of human personality cannot be derived from a secular and humanistic order of values. Under such circumstances Otto's forceful statement of the autonomy of religion is indeed timely.

It is by the fate of *man* in the struggle for existence that the religious feeling is originally determined, and not by the fate of values, as Höffding argues. The fate of values is indeed of basic concern to religion, but only because the meaning of human personality cannot be divorced from the higher values of human life. Throughout the history of religion the relationship of man's essential being to ultimate reality has provided the unique and independent content of the religious judgment, a fact that is quite apparent in all vital religious experience.

The conviction of sin, for example, as an autonomous religious judgment, issues from a valuation of the status and worth of man as man. It is not the sinner's conduct nor his ideas that are primarily judged, although these are involved. It is, however, man's very nature and *being* that is disvalued in the religious sense of creaturehood and profaneness. Man is a sinner and without worth or significance in any ultimate and eternal sense so long as he is separate from or set in opposition to the transcendent holiness of God. This particular implication of the religious judgment is apparent in the emphasis upon the illusoriness of human life in Hindu theology as well as in the Calvinistic doctrine of original guilt and eternal damnation. In similar fashion

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the assurance of salvation involves a valuation, but a new valuation, of human nature as a whole. The “righteousness of faith” is directly conditioned by the transcendent worth and status in which the redeemed participate (a new birth indeed from which a *new being* emerges). This transcendent worth of the reborn, which moral conduct and scientific knowledge can neither provide nor destroy, has a “giveness” about it that the religious man can describe only in terms of the “grace of God.”³³

Mysticism reveals even more clearly the essential concern of religious valuation with the ultimate being and destiny of man. The mystic judges himself as a finite creature to be unreal, utterly worthless, an illusion. In themselves purely secular and human values have no enduring worth or meaning for him. The mystic quest for salvation seems motivated as it were by “the need to be real,” a sort of “ontological ambition,” and the culmination of this quest is seen by the mystic himself as “an initiation into the very moving principles of the cosmos.”³⁴ In this experience the mystic becomes conscious of a new status, a transcendent worthfulness, which he feels constrained to describe in terms of union, even of identity, with God himself.

The sense of sanctity then unmistakably involves an independent and original religious consciousness of absolute worth and status. As such it is the synthetic element that binds together and provides a transcendent ground for the categories of secular value (moral, aesthetic and intellectual). In this fashion, moreover, religion bridges the gap between reality and value, between what is and

³³ cf. the fuller analysis of sin and salvation, chapter III, sections II, III, above.

³⁴ C. A. Bennett, *A Philosophical Study of Mysticism* (Yale Univ. Press, 1928), p.51.

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what ought to be, for it is the essence of religious faith that ultimately the two are identical. Nor does that faith derive from an absoluteness recognized initially in these higher cultural ideals and values. It has its own autonomous foundation in the religious consciousness; in the sense of the sacred there is to be found indeed the source from which goodness, truth and beauty in their deepest significance all stem.

Contrary to Otto's contention, therefore, one must recognize a moral element in religion from the very beginning. In its earlier stages it is difficult, to be sure, to distinguish the presence of what we now regard as morality. There is no difficulty, however, in recognizing in the dawning sense of sanctity in primitive religious experience the emergence of an absolute and transcendent worth from which all morality springs. By this sanctity man's profane or natural desires are checked, abashed and chastened; and that which enables a man to renounce his self-interest for the sake of an absolute ideal, even though dimly and uncertainly apprehended, contains within it the foundation of the moral life. Without the original datum of religious experience (the sense of numinous sanctity) morality could never have meant more than calculating self-interest or conventionally approved conduct. For that matter, it still means no more to those who overlook or disregard the independent religious consciousness of meaning and value from which the absolute imperative of duty ultimately derives.³⁵

Moral obligation of the higher sort, as Kant so clearly saw, contains a moment of transcendence or absoluteness

³⁵ A forthright insistence upon the ultimate dependence of moral obligation upon the religious sense of sanctity is found in John Oman's *The Natural and the Supernatural*, pp.61-65.

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that is of a piece with religious sanctity. If divested of this element, it ceases to be duty as duty is known in the determining crises of life—where it leads a man to sacrifice all he possesses, even life itself, rather than compromise his loyalty to that transcendent and eternal order from which such obligation springs.³⁶ When followed to its logical conclusion Otto's *Idea of the Holy* requires a reversal rather than a severing of the Kantian bond between religion and morality. Only as moral obligation derives cosmic status from the consciousness of absolute and transcendent worth that originates in the religious experience is its full significance revealed. It is upon the religious evaluation of human personality as sacred and hence an end in itself that the validity of Kant's categorical imperative actually depends. As Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out, "the sense of obligation in morals from which Kant tried to derive the whole structure of religion is really derived from the religion itself."³⁷

In like manner truth and beauty also acquire an ultimate and obligatory character only as they too somehow participate in the original numinous sanctity of the religious environment. As a purely pragmatic concept, truth must be defined in terms of hypotheses that lead to certain useful results, and this may well indicate the limits of "scientific" knowledge. Yet only as the intellectual outreach of the human spirit in some sense transcends the finite temporal scheme of things and grasps the absolute and eternal, does the full significance of truth become apparent. This deeper implication of truth is surely of a piece with the sacred; it reflects in man's intellectual values

³⁶ cf. C. A. Bennett, "Religion and the Idea of the Holy," *Journal of Philosophy*, August 19, 1926, p.465.

³⁷ *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.9.

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the absolute quality of sanctity and is not the product of strictly logical or "scientific" reflection, a fact that contemporary pragmatism has taken sufficient pains to make clear.

In the realm of aesthetic valuation the transcendent religious element is even more clearly apparent. The meaning of beauty finds highest expression in the sense of the sublime where an eternal and transcendent order unmistakably shines through the finite and temporal.³⁸ There is in the idea of the sublime, however, simply a clarification and heightening of a moment already to be seen in all great art. In his work the artist is not merely seeking to provide an enduring satisfaction for himself or for others. Certainly he does that. But his vision of the beautiful reveals to the creative artist, whether poet, painter or musician, something by which he is excited and exalted, something of transcendent worth and meaning that makes of him its servant. The effect of his art, moreover, if he succeeds in apprehending and representing that vision, is to reveal to others the same eternal order that gives ultimate significance to his own awareness of beauty.³⁹

In its primary and moving awareness of the absolute and eternal religion thus relates human personality with its highest ideals and values to a cosmic order and environment. Before the immediately-apprehended sanctity of that transcendent order man is both abased and exalted. As "wholly-other" than the natural world by which his own humanity is conditioned, it overwhelms him and leaves him in awed apprehension. As akin nevertheless to the

³⁸ cf. Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.142; *The Idea of the Holy*, p.43.

³⁹ cf. C. A. Bennett, "Poetic Imagination and Philosophy," *Yale Review*, Winter, 1931, p.344; and William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, pp.158-165.

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divine spirit that moves within him, and hence as in some fashion the home of his noblest aspirations and ideals, it thrills and inspires him, arousing within him a devotion and imposing upon him an obligation which his human reason can never fully justify but which in the depths of his spirit he can never deny.

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